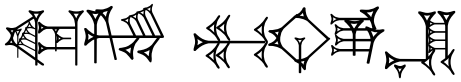


Emegi mu-ub-e-en

a Sumerian-Course

©Thorsten Renk

Version 0.1 (August 21, 2026)

This is an α-Version of the text. It has not been proofread and likely contains errors in spelling, slipped indices, inconsistencies in text and vocabulary etc. As a reader, you're kindly asked to submit all observations of that kind to
thorsten@science-and-fiction.org
such that future versions can be improved. Many thanks in advance!

Disclaimers:

This text is not an academic work and not intended to be one. I have no academic background in either assyriology or linguistics, what I know about both topics is self-taught.

This of course is a chance. As I don't risk an academic career, I can decide to make the language more accessible by glossing over difficulties and complexities which aren't fully understood. I can decide to regularize a language that has been used over a period of 2000 years and almost certainly changed in that time. So - rather than an academic introduction, I can present a language course to just learn to use the language to some degree because I do not need to ready students for the academic world.

I've mainly relied on the following works to learn:

- *Introduction to Sumerian Grammar* by *Daniel A. Foxvog*
- *Elementary Sumerian Glossary* by *Daniel A. Foxvog*
- *A Sumerian Reader* by *Konrad Volk*
- *Manual of Sumerian Grammar and Texts* by *John L. Hayes*
- *A Sumerian Reading Book* by *C. J. Gadd*
- *Numerical and Metrological Graphemes* by *Christine Proust*

(I am well aware that the older works do not represent the current knowledge accurately)

In addition, I've used the following online resources:

- EPSD2: `https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/epsd2/sux`
- electronic Babylonian library: `https://www.ebl.lmu.de/signs/`

Should anyone have comments, corrections or ideas, please get in touch at `thorsten@science-and-fiction.org`.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Why learn Sumerian? As you started to read this book, I guess you might have your own reasons. Personally, I am fascinated by the window into the history of thoughts and ideas learning an ancient language provides. I marvel at the clever plays with words and meanings the Hebrew version of the Bible offers, I enjoy the way Homerian Greek uses metaphors which are so different from what we use today — and I like Sumerian for just the same reasons.

As far as ancient languages are concerned, Sumerian is the starting point, the oldest written language on record that we understand. The original texts can easily be over 4000 years old. I'm amazed reading about Gudeas days of utopia — which read like a communist's dream, or about everyday transactions like a loan of silver that is properly witnessed and recorded.

But why this course?

I started out with Bowen and Lewis' introduction, but I found I couldn't learn with it — my idea of how to teach a language are just too different and its scope was too limited for my ambitions to actually *read texts*. The alternative were of course academic texts, many of which assume the student has learned Akkadian before. I'm not easily scared, I enjoy linguistics and I found Foxvog's grammar concise and well organized — but it's hard to learn vocabulary from a grammar. Hayes has a beautiful introduction to Sumerian through royal inscriptions, increasing in difficulty from lesson to lesson — but royal inscriptions are a very special text genre.

So, I envisioned practicing with prose text, but of course real Sumerian prose text is not structured pedagogically at all — at which point I figured that *writing* some Sumerian text could give me the exercise and vocabulary I needed — and result in an introductory course that's done how I think a language should be taught.

You be the judge of how well that succeeded.

On translation and cultural context

Serious students of language know that it's generally impossible to translate a text from any one language into any other keeping both meaning and style of the text intact. Languages live in cultural contexts that can't be readily assumed to be understood. This is very much true of Sumerian. Words like 'lady' or 'king' or 'god' feature frequently in translations, but there is absolutely no reason to assume they convey an accurate meaning. We translate **lugal** as 'king' and **ensi** as 'governor' — but Gudea was quite happy to be known as 'governor of Lagash' rather than the 'king' that appears the higher rank to us. We translate **nin** as 'lady' — except when we don't, because the being in question is a male warrior god and we translate as 'lord' — which usually we translate when we see **en**.

It's worth keeping this in mind when reading any Sumerian text — the translation is unlikely to capture the essence. The terms probably had quite different nuances of meaning to the speakers four thousand years ago.

Hand copy, transliteration, normalization

Sumerian text appears in a number of guises. Few of us will probably be able to examine the original clay tablets into which the cuneiform signs are engraved, so especially if you're researching from your home computer, you will get to see visual reproductions. Photographs do not necessarily show everything with enough contrast to be readable, so often a hand copy made by an archeologist will be how cuneiform text appears in a publication.

Transliteration is the act of turning the cuneiform script into our script so that you don't need to be able to read cuneiform to study a Sumerian text. The transliteration produces a string of syllables like **dub-sar lugal-la** and it retains all information — the cuneiform writing can be recovered from a transliteration. Nevertheless, it already contains a fair share of interpretation in that a particular sign has to be pronounced with this syllable (say **sar** in the given context rather than **kiri** (which is an entirely valid reading of the same sign).

A normalized text then interprets the transliterated text in terms of the underlying grammar, i.e. it commits to a theory of what the words mean, what their relationship is. The transliteration might read **lugal-la** and the normalized version of this would state that this is because the underlying form is **lugal.ak** — which due to sound shifts and writing conventions is written in a different way. As the normalization is fundementally an interpretation, it no longer allows to reconstruct the original cuneiform.

While normalization is fairly popular in academic Sumerian introduction, it doesn't feature much in this course. The reason is that we usually don't learn languages by analyzing detailed phonetic shifts. The genitive of Finnish **olut** 'beer') is **oluen** with a mysteriously vanished **-t-**, and this can be completely understood by realizing that the original stem is actually **oluk-** — but unless you're a linguist analyzing Finnish sound shifts, that doesn't help learning the language, no Finnish course I've ever seen teaches this way. People who want to learn a language usually just memorize these things and ultimately learn to deal instinctively with such patterns.

On pronounciation

Naturally, it is hard to tell how a four thousand year old language of which we have only written records has been pronounced correcly. What is known about how Sumerian sounds

comes from Akkadian, but Akkadian itself has the same problem — it was a dead language by the time it has been deciphered, so again we lack certainty.

It is possible, even likely, that we miss crucial information. Why are there more than a dozen cuneiform signs representing the sound **sig**? It is possible that Sumerian was a tonal language and they were distinct in pitch modulation — which just wasn't written down. We just don't know.

So just a few notes on what we think we do know:

Sumerian apparently lacks an **o** sound. The other vowels are pronounced as

- **a** as in 'f*a*ther', not as in 'day' or 'hat'
- **e** as in 'p*e*t', not as in 'she'
- **i** as in 'f*ee*', not as in 'lie'
- **u** as in 'c*oo*l', not as in 'use' or 'but'

A few consonants are a bit unusual for an English speaker, here we have

- **g̃** as in 'ri*ng*'
- **h̲** as in Scottish 'lo*ch*'
- **š** as in '*sh*e'

ON NOTATION

As far as pronounciation can be known, Sumerian has many words with identical sound, for instance **e** can mean 'canal', 'house', 'to exit' or 'to ascend'. Yet from the writing, it is clear that these are all different words — because they use different cuneiform signs (it is quite possible that there originally were differences in pronounciation as well which are just lost to us).

To capture this difference in writing for identical sound value, syllables are generally *indexed* when transliterating Sumerian, so now we can distinguish $\mathbf{e}_2$ 'house' from $\mathbf{e}_3$ 'to leave'.

Indexing as such is done everywhere in the literature on Sumerian, but unfortunately not in the same way — for the sake of simplicity (having to do with using a pre-computer typewriter), older publications use the convention that an acute represents the index $_2$ and a grave $_3$, so

du	du
dú	du_2
dù	du_3
du_4	du_4
...	

These accents have no meaning whatsoever for pronounciation and merely represent an alternative way of writing down indices. There are also more complicated indexing schemes for polysyllabic readings in some publications (for instance **tùku** is distinct from **tukù**) — and when one goes back far enough in time, eventually also the numbers in the indexing scheme differ from the modern versions, but none of this needs to concern us here.

The indexing scheme used in this course is, apart from the acute/grave notation, matched to modern online resources.

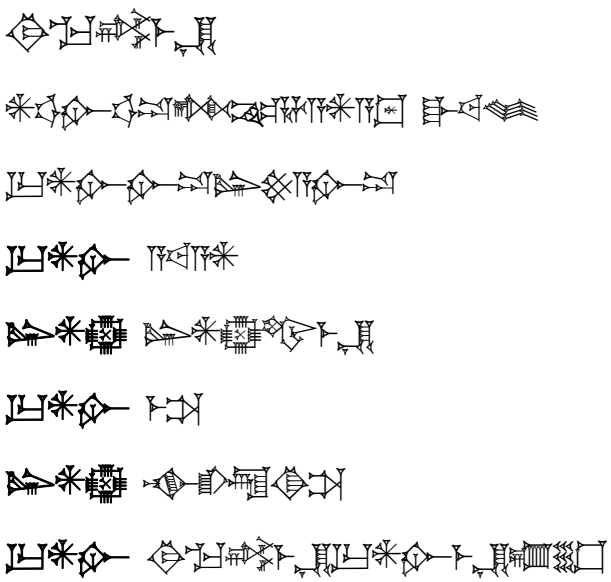
PART I - BASIC KNOWLEDGE

Dub-sar me-en!

Lesson 1

VERBS, THE COPULA AND ADJECTIVES

1.1 TEXT



Silim-ma ḫe$_2$-me-en!
^{d}utu im-e$_3$. eden ne-ha-am$_3$. id$_2$ gal ba-ḫum.
Ur-^{d}Iškur im-ĝen. lu$_2$ kaskal-a im-gub.
Ur-^{d}Iškur: a-ba-am$_3$?
Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara: Lu-^{d}Šara nar-me-en.
Ur-^{d}Iškur: Me-ta?
Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara: Lagaš-ta.
Ur-^{d}Iškur: Silim-ma ḫe$_2$-me-en. Ur-^{d}Iškur-me-en, dub-sar.

May you be in peace!
It was sunrise. The steppe was quiet. The great river was in motion.
Ur-iškur walked. A man stood on the road.
Ur-Iškur: Who is it?
Lu-Šara: I am Lu-Šara, the musician.
Ur-Iškur: From where?
Lu-Šara: From Lagash.
Ur-Iškur: May peace be with you, I am Ur-Iškur, a scribe.

1.2 GRAMMAR

1.2.1 The verb

The Sumerian verb works quite different from its English counterpart. This has to do with how tense is expressed — Sumerian doesn't express past, present and future like English does — and with the role of the *actor*, the person who performs the action expressed by the verb.

Ergativity

In English, the usage of the verb is centered around the idea that it describes what someone (an actor) *does*. The English sentence cannot grammatically be without a subject. If in an English sentence the actor is not known, not mentioned or logically doesn't exist, a couple of different constructions can happen.

For instance, in the expression 'it was raining' a meaningless pronoun 'it' is inserted - there is no actor that did the raining, 'it' doesn't refer to any other noun, it is merely there for grammatical reasons — the construction is impersonal.

Often, the passive is used to render sentences where the actor isn't named, such as in 'an oath was sworn'.

In the expression 'the man died', a verb different from 'to kill' is used to express the idea that there was no actor - 'a man was killed' is different in that it suggests an unnamed agent that caused the death.

In Sumerian, a verb instead describes what *happens* and the Sumerian sentence cannot be without an object that names the person or thing to which the verbal action happens. So the English passive 'an oath was sworn' and the intransitive 'a man died' as well as 'a man was killed' come out with the same structure in Sumerian, because logically the first renders as 'swearing happened regarding an oath' and the second as 'dying happened to a man'.

Using **lu**$_2$ 'man' or **mu** 'oath' as example with the verbs **uš**$_2$ 'to die' or **pa**$_3$ 'to swear, we get

lu_2 ba-$uš_2$ (a man died)
mu ba-pa_3 (an oath was sworn)

A consequence of all this is that the subject of English intransitive expressions (i.e. sentences with verbs like 'to die, to stand, to sleep' that can't take a direct object in English — after all one can't e.g. 'sleep *something*') switch their English subject to the verbal object in Sumerian. The reason is that intransitive verbs describe only what the actor does (but not to whom), but in the Sumerian logic that is exactly what *happens* to him.

By the same logic, there is no need for a different verb to translate 'he died' and 'he was killed' in Sumerian, the thing which makes them different is just whether the actor is named or not (more on that later).

Ergativity at first glance seems more complicated than it really is — most of the time the meaning of a sentence is quite clear and as later lessons explain more of the details, the way Sumerian differs from English will become clear.

Tense

As mentioned above, Sumerian isn't concerned with past, present and future. Rather the verb expresses whether an event is visualized as completed (perfect) or not (imperfect). The standard form of the verb is the perfect or (using the Akkadian term) **ḫamtu** root, alternatively a verb can be in the imperfect or **maru** form.

Typically we translate **ḫamtu** using past or prefect tense (as the action is completed and hence most likely has been in the past) and **maru** with present or future tense — but that is not a hard rule. A speaker can use **ḫamtu** to refer to a future event that he envisions as overwhelmingly likely to be completed, or use **maru** to refer to something that has started in the past but is still on-going.

For the time being, we deal with **ḫamtu** in the texts and examples and **maru** will be introduced later in 7.2.1.

Verbal root, stem and conjugation

The basic form of the verb is called its *root*. The verbal root is the form listed in the vocabulary, for instance as $\mathbf{e}_3$ 'to go out'. The English infinitive is not the translation of the Sumerian root, it is just how verbs are typically listed in English.

The Sumerian root in isolation carries the idea of a noun 'one who performs the verbal action' without reference to a specific time. This is evident in many compound words, like **dub-sar** 'scribe' which is 'one who writes' (**sar**) 'on a clay tablet' (**dub**). The stem used such doesn't express that someone is writing just now or that he has written in the past and is finished, it just describes a habitual action.

Whenever the verb is to be used as a verb, i.e. to describe an action, it needs to be *conjugated* — modified such that it expresses things like tense and person. As mentioned above, tense is conveyed by using either **ḫamtu** or **maru** verbal *stem*. These stems are formed from the verbal root. The **ḫamtu** stem that concerns us now is in fact identical to the root.

Sumerian then adds at minimum elements that can be described as *conjugation prefixes* (that name is being criticized as misleading by some scholars, the approach taken here is very pragmatic — the elements are prefixes and they are used in the conjugation of the verb, so the name makes sense).

Two examples for that are **ba-** and **im-**. If these elements come before the verbal stem, the verb describes an event:

ba-uš$_2$ (he died) from **uš**$_2$ 'to die'
lu$_2$ ba-uš$_2$ (a man died)
ba-sar (it was written)
mu ba-sar (a text was written)

Because all these are in **ḫamtu** we translate them as past tense and as the 3rd person is not specifically marked, we can always add a 3rd person pronoun to the translation.

In the last example, note the effect of ergativity: The verb **sar** takes as a direct object *that what is written*, so **ba-sar** cannot mean '**he wrote' — that would require to specify the actor (or *agent*, as we will later call him), and he is not part of the simple form **ba-sar** (we would have to write **ba-an-sar** 'he wrote (it)' instead).

While it is difficult to pin down a clear-cut difference between **im-** and **ba-** in Sumerian, the pattern seems to be that **im-** is preferred in situations which English would render as active whereas **ba-** tends to be used where we translate passive/impersonal. Thus

ba-sar (it was written)
im-gub (he stood)
im-ĝen (he went)

So, to summarize: Adding a conjugation prefix to a verbal stem results in a 3rd person sg. verb that takes as the direct object the person/thing to which the verbal action happens. This can be passive, impersonal or an intransitive verb in the English translation.

1.2.2 The adjective

Different from English, the Sumerian adjective follows the noun it describes. So a 'great person' becomes **lu**$_2$ **gal** (with **gal** 'great') in Sumerian.

In fact, as we will see later, something even more profound happens — noun and adjective merge into a single grammatical unit and become part of the *noun chain* — any case or plural endings we apply to the noun end up with the adjective as this is where the chain ends.

The distinction between adjectives and verbs isn't as clear-cut as in English — Sumerian has several verbs which translate as 'to be X' or 'to have property X', such as **sa**$_6$ 'to be beautiful'. Such forms can be used as verbs **lu**$_2$ **ba-sa**$_6$ (the person was beautiful), but they can also be marked with an ending **-a** and then used as regular adjectives.

On the other hand, several adjectives are typically marked with the same **-a** when they are used to describe a noun.

Here we encounter for the first time a phenomenon that is fairly frequent in Sumerian — adding endings is never simple. One complication are *hidden consonants*. Such consonants are not visible in writing (or spoken) when the basic form of the word is used, but as soon as an ending is appended, they become visible. The adjective **kala** 'mighty' for instance has a hidden **-g**, so it might at some point have read ***kalag** — and we list it in the vocabulary as **kala(g)**. Now, when applying the ending, the outcome is not **kala-a* or even **kalag-a*, Sumerian writing prefers to *pick up the final consonant* in writing the ending as **kala-ga** (the reasons for that will become apparent later). The same is true for **sa**$_6$ which comes out as **sa**$_6$**-ga** 'beautiful'.

Chances are that the picked up consonant was never spoken doubly, so while the writer inscribes **kala(g)-ga**, he would perhaps speak **?kalaga** — but after 4000 years, it's hard to be certain.

Forms with a hidden consonant are fairly frequent and will be marked as such in the vocabulary.

1.2.3 The copula

The copula, otherwise known as the verb 'to be', establishes a relationship of identity between two nouns or a noun or a relationship of a description between a noun and an adjective.

The most common form of the copula is an ending that is appended to the last word of a noun chain (if a noun is qualified by an adjective, that is the last word) The endings are

Subject	Singular	Plural
1. Person	-me-en (I am)	-me-en-de_3-en (we are)
2. Person	-me-en (you are)	-me-en-ze_2-en (you are)
3. Person	-Vm, -am_3 (he, she, it is)	-me-eš (they are)

Note that the 1st and 2nd person are identical in form, only context can help to decide how to translate.

dum-sar-me-en (I am a scribe)
dub-sar-am_3 (he is a scribe)
nar gal-am_3 (the musician is great)
Lu_2-^{d}Šara nar gal-am_3 (Lu-Šara is a great musician)

(We will see examples in plural once the plural of nouns has been discussed in 6.2.3).

The third person sg. ending tends to pick up the vowel of the word it is appended to if that ends in a vowel. Thus

dumu-um (he is a son)

The third person may also (in writing) pick up the last consonant and must make hidden consonants appear:

kala-ga-am_3 (he is mighty)
dub-sar gal-la-am_3 (he is a great scribe)

The last form might also be (rarely) written with a different sign as

dub-sar gal-lam (he is a great scribe)

Because the copula establishes a relation between nouns, there is no idea of tense expressed. Sentences can thus be translated in past, presence or future, just as required by context.

In short expressions where the context is clear, the copula is also frequently omitted.

1.2.4 The article

Sumerian does not have either a definite or indefinite article, **dub-sar** can thus equally be translated as 'the scribe' or 'a scribe', only context can decide.

1.3 VOCABULARY

Sumerian	English
a-ba	who?
e_3	to exit, go out
eden	steppe, plain
dub	clay tablet
dub-sar	scribe
dumu	son, child, citizen
gal	great
ĝen	to go
gub	to stand, set up
ḫum	to be in motion
i_7	river
id_2	river
kala(g)	mighty
kaskal	road
lu_2	person, someone
mu	text, oath, year, name
nar	musician
ne-ha	peaceful
pa_3(d)	to find, swear, propose
sa_6(g)	to be good, beautiful
sar	to write
silim	peace
ur	dog, wolf, 'warrior'
$uš_2$	to die
^{d}utu	Utu (sun god)

Note: Translate **kaskal-a** as 'on the road' and **Lagaš-ta** as 'from Lagaš' (the forms will be discussed later)

1.4 CONVERSATION — NAMES AND GREETINGS

Naturally, it is difficult to say with any sort of accuracy how *spoken* Sumerian worked when all we have are written records. Thus, the conversation chapters are not meant to be terribly serious — but just in case you'd like to *talk* to someone in Sumerian (it is, after all a language) — this is how it might work.

If you want to spell out your name in Sumerian, you have to do it in syllables (and use syllabic writing). The obvious difficulty is that there is no **o** in Sumerian phonology, so you have to work around that. The Sumerians did just the same — 'Hammurabi' for instance, an Akkadian name, is spelled **ḫa-am-mu-ra-bi** in Sumerian text. Likewise, 'Peter' could be rendered as **pe-te-er**, 'Lucy' as **lu-zi** or 'Meghan' as **me-ga-an** (or **me-gan**).

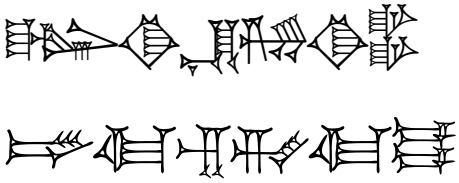
But you might as well pick a Sumerian name — at least important people like kings seemed to have picked throne-names themselves later in their life. One common way how Sumerian names are composed start from the name of a deity like Nammu, Inanna, Iškur, Šara, Sin or Ningal and add a qualifier in front, often an animal. For instance Ur-Nammu means 'wolf of Nammu' or 'warrior of Nammu', Amar-Sin means 'calf of Sin', Geme-Nungal means 'maid of Nungal', Lu-Šara means 'person of Šara' (in cuneiform or transliteration, the names pick up a marker for the divine name in the middle, i.e. **ur-^{d}nammu, geme$_2$-^{d}nin-gal**. A list of Sumerian names in cuneiform writing can be found in appendix G.

If you want to say 'hi' in Sumerian, the closest equivalent is **silim** 'peace' — which is short for the phrase **silim-ma ḫe-me-en** 'may you be in peace'. We can imagine that the Sumerians used the full phrase only for formal occasions and otherwise just stuck to **silim**.

1.5 READING CUNEIFORM

Reading cuneiform is not simple — not at all. Cuneiform is not merely a set of signs with a direct correspondence to words, syllables or sounds, it adds a full new layer of complexity to reading Sumerian that at least doubles the difficulty of reading a cuneiform text compared to reading the same text in transliteration. About every complication you can think of actually seems occur — the same sign can regularly mean different things, the same thing can regularly be expressed using different signs, signs can be used in multiple different ways, some of them being not part of the spoken text itself, different scribes do not always draw the same sign in the same way, in different periods the signs look different...

For instance, consider the title 'King of Sumer and Akkad' in Sumerian cuneiform and Old Babylonian cursive cuneiform:



'King of Sumer and Akkad'

These are actually the same signs in different 'fonts', but it's hard to spot that on first glance. Generally, Sumerian cuneiform looks more like pictograms (from which the script evolved) while the later stages look like the more iconic 'wedge-shaped' script.

Add to these difficulties a few more mundane ones. For instance, many online resources of cuneiform texts are actually hand-copies of tablets made by modern scholars. These scholars often have developed their own short-hand for the different signs, so a student needs to learn to recognize those as well. In addition to that, clay tablets may be (and frequently are) incomplete or damaged, a Sumerian scribe might have made an error in drawing a sign, equally well the modern hand-copy might contain an error...

At least the last set of complications is absent in this course because everything is written in one standard cuneiform font!

So, let's start carefully and slowly by explaining what a cuneiform sign in a text might actually stand for. Alas, 'slowly' in practice probably means you won't be able to just read the lesson cuneiform text for a while yet, you have to come back to it later.

1.5.1 Referencing cuneiform signs

It is nice to be able to talk with another person about issues with a Sumerian text without having a pen and a napkin to draw every sign. To make that possible, each sign has a name assigned that corresponds to one (often the most common) reading of the sign. When we refer to that sign by name, we write it in capitals, so 'the KA sign' or 'E_2' (the sign name can have an index). This is useful to describe a problem where you can recognize the sign, but don't know what they mean in this context, so you could ask 'I'm seeing PA.TE.SI here - what does that mean?' (signs written next to each other are usually separated by a dot).

If you ever need to look up a sign, there are various sign lists available — and each sign also has a number there. For instance E_2 is also 'aBZ 107' (where aBZ stands for 'altbabylonische Zeichenliste', i.e. 'old Babylonic sign list'). If you know the name of the sign and have aBZ as a resource, the list has an index of sign names that allows to find the number in the list. If you then look into the list, you can find the shape of the sign in different periods as well as different readings.

1.5.2 Logograms

Logograms are the first and most obvious idea of how a written sign could represent language — each sign just depicts a word. If you want to write 'head', you just draw a head, problem solved. Of course, this runs into issues rather sooner than later. Some words, say 'kingship', are really hard to draw. Also typical language has a few ten thousand words (about 16.000 Sumerian words are listed in academic dictionaries) but there are only a few hundred cuneiform signs.

One possibility is to modify and combine signs. Let's take a look at SAG (which actually depicts a head if you take into account that what is now left was up in the original, earliest stages of the script).

 SAG sag̃ 'head'  KA ka 'mouth'

 A a 'water'  KAxA nag̃ 'to drink'

If one uses little strokes ('**gunu**') to a particular area to indicate its importance, the sign changes meaning to KA 'mouth', if we add the sign for water A *into* the sign for mouth (this is indicated with an 'x', so the name of the sign is now KAxA), the resulting meaning is something where we have water in the mouth, thus 'to drink'.

Sometimes it is possible to use such relationships as aids to memorize cuneiform signs and their meaning, but more often than not it isn't so straightforward.

What usually happens is that a single sign, read as logogram, can take a multitude of (loosely) related meanings. Thus, KA can also be read as **inim** 'word' ('what comes out of the mouth') or $\mathbf{du}_{11}$ 'to speak'. So when we see a KA sign somewhere in the text, we have to figure out from the context whether it should actually be 'mouth', 'word' or 'to speak'.

1.5.3 Syllabic writing

Equally well, cuneiform signs can stand for syllables. When used like this, the original pictorial meaning of a sign has nothing to do at all with what it means — in syllabic writing, a sign just stands for a sound. When KA is read syllabically, we just read the sound *ka* and combine it with matching syllables before or after:

 ka-al 'loam pit'

Unfortunately, it frequently happens that the same sound has several different ways to write it. For instance, there are five different signs that can represent the sound **e** (to distinguish them, Sumerian transliteration is written with indices):

 e  e_2  e_3  e_4  e_5

Usually always the same sign is used for a particular syllable, so one gets by with learning less than a hundred signs or so to read syllabically — but there are exceptions. Some

common signs can vexingly be read as quite different syllables, while sometimes a different sign is used to write a syllable which usually is expressed by a more common sign for no discernable reason.

Generally all the grammar — case endings, prefixes, infixed prepositions... is written syllabically. A fair share of nouns also are written this way, but verbal stems only in rare cases.

And since it is available, also syllabic writing can be used to change logograms — for instance take KA and write ME into it instead of A, and the resulting KAxME yields **eme** 'tongue, language', write NUN insto it instead and it yields **nundum** 'lip'.

 KAxME eme 'tongue'  KAxNUN nundum 'lip'

Here the sound of the syllable rather than the meaning of the additional sign acts as a reminder of how the sign is to be read.

1.5.4 Determinatives

Adding clues how a particular sign is to be read is useful in a more general way to cut through the problem of each logogram meaning a dozen different things. It is hence a natural development to simply write signs into the text that are nothing but clues of how another sign needs to be understood.

For instance, KAL has the basic logographic meaning of 'strong'. This can apply to strong materials, so by writing either the sign for wood or the sign for stone in front of it, we get 'strong wood' i.e. 'ebony' or 'strong stone' i.e. 'diorite'.

 GIŠ.KAL ^{giš}esi ebony

 NA_4.KAL ^{na4}esi diorite

Determinatives aren't pronounced, they are just added clues, so when transliterating cuneiform, they are usually written in a small and raised font to make that clear.

The number of determinative signs is fairly limited, the most common ones are less than twenty. Some of them regularly occur *before* the word they refer to (like in the above example), others *follow* (the most prominent being KI, indicating the name of a place).

1.5.5 Compound signs

Compound signs are really just a variant of what we have already discussed, i.e. the idea of writing a sign inside another one. Compound signs do the same in principle, but the obvious difficulty is that for them the signs are written next to each other — and unlike writing one sign into another one, this gives no clue that we are dealing with a compound.

Consider the following example:

 PA.TE.SI ensi$_2$ 'city ruler'

This *looks* like ***pa-te-si* in syllabic writing (and in older resources like Gadd from 1924 it is actually transliterated such!) — yet you're just supposed to memorize that whenever you see these three signs, you have to read **ensi**$_2$. There's no graceful way to recognize such compound signs without knowing them, for instance it isn't readily obvious why these signs should be associated with the meaning of 'city-ruler'. One can theorize of course,

the first one depicts a scepter and the last one seems a syllabic clue — but that's reasoning after knowing the meaning.

By and large you just have to learn compound signs one by one.

1.5.6 What is what?

Hopefully, it's clear by now that the first step in reading cuneiform is figuring out what role a particular sign has in the text. Unfortunately there is no neat division — there are signs which can occur in all four roles, i.e. they can be logograms, have a common syllabic reading, act as determinatives and are part of common compound signs. So just recognizing the sign doesn't necessarily help.

Consider for instance the sign IM. It is listed twice in the following — as a logogram reading **iškur** (the name of the god of storm and rain which occurs as part of the name Ur-Iškur) and as the syllable **im** — which is used in the text as the conjugation prefix.

So, when you see the sign in the text, you have to decide which reading is relevant for each case.

We'll learn a few tricks how to approach that particular problem in the next lesson.

1.5.7 Sign list

It may look a bit daunting, but if you really want to read cuneiform, you have to learn a lot of signs — inclusing their readings and meanings — and each lesson will add a fair number on top of the last.

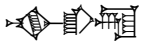
There is, unfortunately, no real way around that.

The signs to learn are organized by their function. The same sign may be listed in different categories, or again in a later lesson when a different reading is introduced. To quickly see whether something is indeed the same sign, refer to the sign name (in capitals). The reference for sign names in this course is the **electronic Babylonian Library** (eBL).

Logogram and compound sign meaning you can expect to find in the lesson's vocabulary by directly looking up the sign reading. This is not so for syllabic readings, but the vocabulary tells you (via the index on the syllable) what signs are used to write a word. The syllabic readings are relatively common readings — but in any individual text, of course differences can occur.

You need most of the following cuneiform signs to read the lesson text. At this point, it's best if you use the transliterated text as a reference and try to understand how it relates to the cuneiform text. A few signs are introduced to allow you to write the grammar that is presented.

Logograms and compound sign readings:

	DI	silim		A.LAGAB×HAL	id_2
	AN	utu		A.AN	am_3
	EDIN	eden		NU_{11}.BUR.LA	lagaš
	LUM	hum		PA.TE.SI	$ensi_2$
	GAL	gal		LAGAB×IGI	šara
	IM	iškur		UD.DU	e_3
	SAR	sar		LU_2	lu_2
	UD	utu		UR	ur
	DUB	dub		LUL	nar
	DU	ĝen, gub			

Syllabic readings:

	MA	ma		EN	en
	GAN	he		E	e
	ME	me		MU	mu
	A	a		BA	ba
	TA	ta		NE	ne, de_3, bi_2
	HA	ha		ZE_2	ze_2

Determinatives (in brackets the meaning and whether the sign is written before or after the word it specifies):

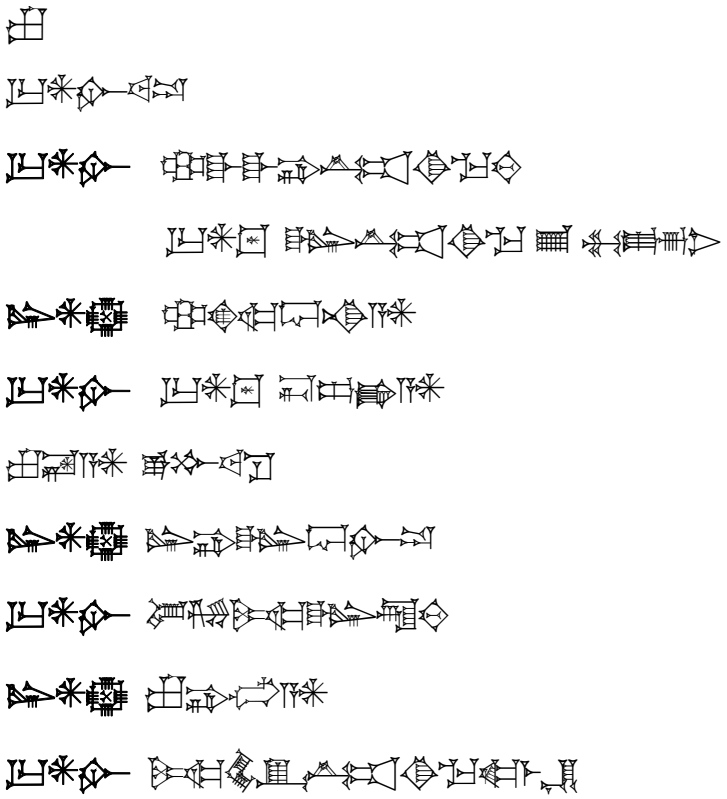
	GIŠ	(‘of wood’, front)		AN	(‘divine name’, front)
	KI	(‘place’, back)		NA_4	(‘of stone’, front)

With these signs, you should be able to figure out the text of the first lesson by comparing with the transliteration. Some signs in the examples and explanations are not in this lesson’s sign list, don’t worry, they will come at a later time!

Lesson 2

ERGATIVE, GENITIVE AND EQUATIVE

2.1 TEXT



Iri

Ur^{d}Iškur ba-gub.

Ur^{d}Iškur: bad$_3$ gal gal-bi uri$_5^{ki}$-ma-kam. Ur-^{d}Nammu lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma-ke mu-un-du$_3$.

Lu$_2^{d}$šara: bad$_3$ ḫur-saĝ-gin$_7$-na-am$_3$.

Ur^{d}Iškur: Ur-^{d}Nammu nita kala-ga-am$_3$.

Iri daĝal-am$_3$. e-sir$_2$ ba-si.

Lu$_2^{d}$šara: lu$_2$-bi lugal-gin$_7$ im-ĝen.

Ur^{d}Iškur: Shul-gi dumu sag̃ lugal-la-kam.

Lu$_2^{d}$šara: iri-bi mah-am$_3$!

Ur^{d}Iškur: dumu sag̃-ku$_3$-g̃al$_2$ uri$_5^{ki}$-ma-ka-me-en.

The city

Ur-iškur stood.

Ur-iškur: That very great wall is the wall of Ur. Ur-Nammu, the king of Ur, built it.

Lu-šara: The wall is like a mountain!

Ur-iškur: Ur-Nammu is a mighty man.

The city was wide. The street filled up.

Lu-šara: That man walked like a king!

Ur-iškur: He is Shulgi, the eldest son of the king.

Lu-šara: This city is magnificient!

Ur-iškur: I'm a proud citizen of Ur.

2.2 GRAMMAR

2.2.1 The genitive

Function

The genitive is a case that establishes a relation between two nouns. In Sumerian it more or less expresses what the English 'of' does — blood relation 'son of the king', origin 'a citizen of Ur', professional relationships 'the scribe of the king', but also possession 'the stylus of the scribe' or characteristics 'the courage of the warrior'.

A genitive links two nouns, for example the thing that is possessed ('stylus') and the possessor ('scribe') and the word order is just like in English — the thing being possessed comes in front.

Formation

In Sumerian, the genitive is expressed by the ending **-ak** — but you will hardly ever read it written like this. In order to understand how it is written, we need to consider four properties of Sumerian writing (two of which we have already seen):

- Hidden consonants: Whenever a word ends with a hidden consonant, appending any ending — including the genitive ending — makes it visible
- Picking up of consonants: When a word ends with an openly visible consonant, appending a vocalic ending usually picks up the last consonant in writing

- Final **-k** is hidden: Sumerian doesn't usually show this letter as final consonant of any word, so if *only* the genitive ending is appended, it can never be written **-ak** because of that rule. Instead, the genitive ending always *creates* a hidden consonant **-(k)** that becomes visible if more endings are appended.
- The **-a-** of the genitive ending is a weak vowel — when a word ends otherwise in a vowel, it simply merges into that vowel

Let's consider a few examples:

dumu lugal + ak becomes **dumu lugal-la** ('son of the king')— **lugal** ends with a consonant, that is picked up (rule 2) while the final **-k** is hidden (rule 3).

me diĝir + ak becomes **me diĝir-ra** ('power of the god')— **diĝir** ends with a consonant, that is picked up (rule 2) while the final **-k** is hidden (rule 3).

lugal uri$_5^{ki}$ + ak becomes **lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma** ('king of Ur') because **uri$_5^{ki}$** ends with a hidden **-m** that is made visible by the ending (rule 1) while the final **-k** is again deleted (rule 3).

nin ĝir$_2$-su^{ki} + ak becomes simply **nin ĝir$_2$-su^{ki}** ('lady of Girsu') because the final **-k** is hidden (rule 3) while the remaining **-a** merges with the already present **-u** and effectively vanishes completely — only context remains to deduce that there is a genitive. However, the form now has a hidden ending and properly is **nin ĝir$_2$-su(k)^{ki}**, which is important if endings are applied, e.g.

nin ĝir$_2$-su^{ki}-kam (she is the lady of Girsu)

Basically a second ending that starts with a vowel can bring out the **-k** of the genitive, an ending with a consonant leaves only the **-a-**:

dub-sar lugal-la-me-en (I am the scribe of the king)
dub-sar lugal-la-kam (he is the scribe of the king)

Genitive and the noun chain

In the discussion of the adjective, we have described the *noun chain*. The genitive is also a form that contributes to that chain — in essence Sumerian sees two nouns linked by a genitive as a new unit that has the grammatical role of a single noun — any case endings are now appended to the whole chain.

Let's try this with 'the scribe of the king's son' — we know that 'the king's son' (the innermost genitive) is **dumu lugal-la** from above. Now, if we see this as a new unit, we can apply the genitive construction as above and bring the scribe in with **dub-sar (dumu lugal-la) + ak**. Now, remembering rule 3, **lugal-la** contains a hidden **-k** while the second and new **-k** now becomes hidden, the outcome is **dub-sar dumu lugal-la-ka**.

Similarly

dam lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma-ka (the wife of the king of Ur)
dumu nin ĝir$_2$-su-ka (the son of the lady of Girsu)

How does the adjective fit into all of this? After all, the adjective too becomes part of the noun chain.

The adjective has the closest position to it's noun in the chain, it is never separated by any other element or ending. Thus, it is simply slipped into a genitive chain in the right position.

šeš tur lugal kala-ga (the young brother of the mighty king)
dam dub-sar tur lugal-la-ka (the wife of the young scribe of the king)

The complete rules of forming the noun chain are summarized in appendix A.1.

2.2.2 Apposition

A second noun can follow another to offer an explanation of qualification. In that case, the nouns stand in apposition. For instance 'my friend Peter' has 'Peter' adding information to 'my friend'.

Sumerian works pretty much the same — no special case markers are needed in this case.

> Ur-^{d}Iškur dub-sar (Ur-Iškur the scribe)
> iri uri$_5^{ki}$ (the city Ur)

(Note in the second example that English might use a genitive here as in 'the City of London' — Sumerian does not).

Sumerian however is even a bit more flexible than English — it allows to add an unwritten 'who is' or 'who has' to the second noun (which can itself be a full noun chain).

> dub-sar saĝ (the scribe [who is] head, the chief scribe)
> lugal a$_2$ kala (the king [who has] a mighty arm, the king with mighty strength)

2.2.3 The equative

The equative is used to say that one thing is *like* another (which is another relationship between two nouns). Usually this involces the copula 'the man is like a giant' but it can also involve verbs as in 'the king laughed like a madman'.

The Sumerian ending is **-gin**$_7$ and using this ending is refreshingly complication-free.

> dub-sar udu-gin$_7$-am$_3$ (the scribe is like a sheep)
> munus nin-gin$_7$ ba-sa$_6$ (the woman is beautiful like a lady)

2.2.4 The ergative

In the last lesson, we discussed simple sentences which render as intransitive or passive in English to introduce the concept of ergativity, for instance:

> lu$_2$ ba-uš$_2$ (the man died)

If we want to introduce the idea that someone else is responsible for the death, English gives us various options. We could say that 'the man died by the hand of a soldier' or 'a soldier killed the man' or 'the man was killed by the soldier' — logically all these expressions are equivalent, each tells what happened, who the victim was and who did the deed. The variants do express different stylistic nuances in English — which are not translatable into Sumerian — but then again, Sumerian has its own stylistic nuances which do not translate into English well.

The ergative case

In Sumerian, to render the idea of a soldier killing a man, we specify the soldier as an *agent* and mark him for the so-called *ergative* case by appending an **-e** to the noun.

> aga$_3$-us$_2$-e lu$_2$ mu-uš$_2$ (the man died by the hand of a soldier)

Now, one of the stylistic variants of Sumerian is that *often* sentences with agents have **mu-** as a conjugation prefix (which is a variant of **im-** seen previously that has to be used when it is not directly before the verbal root) whereas agentless sentences seem to prefer **ba-**. The precise nuance that is expressed by that change eludes us, for the time being we leave conjugation prefixes largely untranslated.

The above sentence also expresses the typical word order of a Sumerian sentence — ergative, object and the verb is last.

Ergative resumed

A specialty of Sumerian is, that the verb can *resume* case markers seen before in the sentence. The way this is done for the ergative case 3rd person is to insert an **-n-** directly before the verbal root. In addition, a vowel is used that harmonizes with the syllable that comes before, often the the conjugation prefix. So the example sentence would come out as

aga$_3$-us$_2$-e lu$_2$ mu-un-uš$_2$ (a soldier killed the man)

or

aga$_3$-us$_2$-e lu$_2$ ba-an-uš$_2$ (a soldier killed the man)

if for some reason we had been using **ba-** as conjugation prefix.

Resuming in this case doesn't add any information we didn't already have, it is the equivalent of saying 'a soldier *he* killed the man' in English. So why is it done in Sumerian?

First of all, it doesn't actually have to be done. A case marker is required only once — it can be with the noun or with the verb only, adding a case marker to the noun and resuming it with the verb is hyper-correct and unlikely to have occurred in spoken language.

And second, it has its uses.

One function is that resuming allows *pronouns* to be inserted into a sentence. If we want to distinguish 'a man died' from 'he killed a man', the ergative marker with the verb makes the difference:

lu$_2$ ba-uš$_2$ (a man died)
lu$_2$ ba-an-uš$_2$ (he killed a man) or:
lu$_2$ mu-un-uš$_2$ (he killed a man)

The ergative case marker in the verbal chain tells us that a pronoun has to be read even if there is no noun in ergative case in the sentence. Note that the ergative marker *always* comtains a pronoun — this is not so for other resumed cases which we will study later.

Grammatical gender

This is a good point to talk about grammatical gender in Sumerian. There are two genders being kept apart — personal and impersonal (Sumerian does not distinguish male and female like English does).

- gods, free men and women and children as individuals count as person
- slaves and dead bodies *may* be counted as person
- collective words like 'troops', 'the people' or 'workers', even if they consist of persons, count as impersonal
- groups of unnamed people as in '20 soldiers' count as impersonal

- everything else counts as impersonal

We've learned above that 3rd person ergative is resumed using **-n-**, but that is only true for persons. Impersonal gender is resumed using **-b-**

aga$_3$-us$_2$-e lu$_2$ ba-an-uš$_2$ (a soldier killed the man)
erin$_2$-e lu$_2$ mu-ub-uš$_2$ (the troops killed the man)
lu$_2$ mu-ub-uš$_2$ (they killed the man)

2.2.5 Demonstrative

Demonstrative pronounds like 'this' or 'that' point towards a thing to distinguish it from others — 'this tablet' denotes a particular tablet, not any.

Sumerian has a number of demonstrative pronouns, the most common one is **-bi** which is usually translated with 'this' or 'that'.

dub-sar-bi (this scribe)
bad$_3$ gal-bi (that great wall)

In the noun chain, the demonstrative comes *after* the adjective but *before* any case endings. That means it may be modified. If the ergative **-e** is appended to a possessive, the resulting ending is written **-be**$_2$. If a genitive ending is appended, the result is different from the normal rule and ends up being **-ba**. As pronouns unfortunately show several exceptions to the normal patterns of case inflection, they are summarized in appendix D.

dub-sar-bi-gin$_7$ (like this scribe)
bad$_3$ gal-ba (of that great wall)

Unfortunately you can't be sure when seeing the ending **-bi** that it actually is a demonstrative — it may be in other functions. One of them we will study in the next lesson.

2.2.6 Noun and adjective reduplication

It is possible to repeat a noun (especially when it is written with a single logogram) in writing. This expresses plurality, often with a connotation 'all the…'

diĝir diĝir (all the gods)
e$_2$ e$_2$ uri$_5^{ki}$-ma (all the houses of Ur)

Equally well, an adjective can be repeated in this way, but this may express alternatively also intensity.

diĝir gal gal (all the great gods, the very great god)
e$_2$ maḫ maḫ (the magnificient temples, the splendid temple)
eden daĝal daĝal (the wide expanse of the plain)

This can be ambiguous — sometimes the context makes it clear what is meant

^{d}en-lil$_2$ diĝir gal gal-am$_3$ (Enlil is a very great god)

(Enlil can't possibly be several gods) sometimes the translation remains tricky.

2.3 VOCABULARY

Sumerian	English
a_2	arm, strength
aga_3-us_2	soldier
bad_3	wall
du_3	to build
dag̃al	wide
dam	spouse
diĝir	god
e_2	house, temple
$erin_2$	troops, workers (coll.)
e-sir_2	street
ḫur-saĝ	mountain
maḫ	magnificient
me	divine power
munus	woman
nita	male, man
nin	lady
sag̃	head
sag̃-ku_3-g̃al_2	proud
si	to fill
šeš	brother
tur	small, young
udu	sheep
uri(m)$_5^{ki}$	Ur (city)

2.4 CONVERSATION — INTRODUCING YOURSELF

The Sumerians didn't have any family names, so they did what people in medieval times did when they had a need to distinguish themselves from others with the same given name — they stated their profession. In addition to that, it is fairly common in legal documents to see the name of the father and his profession. Grammatically the fathername and profession are an apposition in genitive — so that's not too hard.

Ur-^{d}Iškur dub-sar dumu Ur-^{d}Nanna maškim-ma

introduces Ur-Iškur the scribe, son of Ur-Nanna the administrator.

Note that **dumu** just refers to any child, so the same phrase could be used for a woman — though you'd still want to refer to the father rather than the mother — Sumerian women did have legal rights to property and such like, but generally they did not live in a gender-equal society, then men were more important.

You might find the following professions useful:

ensi$_2$(k) (city ruler, governor), lugal (king, warleader), išib (priest, possibly exorcist), dub-sar (scribe), maškim (administrator), sipa (shepherd), ugula (foreman), il$_2$ (porter), aga$_3$-us$_2$ (soldier), arad (servant), geme$_2$ (female servant), unud (herdsman), šitim (builder), muḫaldim (cook), engar (farmer), gudug (priest), nagar (carpenter), kar-kid (prostitute), nar (musician), šakkan (general), dam-gar$_3$ (trader, merchant)

2.5 PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Translate the following expressions into English: a) lu_2 lugal-gin_7 b) munus-bi dam-lugal-la-kam c) udu dub-sar-ra d) bad_3 tur-bi e) a_2 me diğir-ra-gin_7 f) bad_3 bad_3 iri g) e-sir_2 dağal-am_3

Exercise 2: Translate into Sumerian a) Ur-Iškur is a scribe b) the city is beautiful c) the troops built a wall d) a soldier built a wall e) a wall was built f) it was filled g) that man killed the scribe h) the young brother of the king i) the great wall of Ur

Exercise 3: Put into genitive: a) dam b) nin c) nita d) uri_5^{ki} e) $ensi_2$ f) šeš tur g) nin-bi h) eden dağal i) dumu lugal-la j) dam dub-sar-ra

2.6 READING CUNEIFORM

We've learned in the previous lesson that a single sign can have different roles and readings. Thus, to read any cuneiform text, we first have to find out in what function a particular sign serves, then we have to decide upon a reading.

Unfortunately, that is often easier said than done.

2.6.1 Punctuation

If the typical word order is ergative, object, verb, it should be possible to readily spot the verb. Unfortunately, cuneiform is written without punctuation, so it isn't always readily apparent at which point a sentence is over and a new one starts.

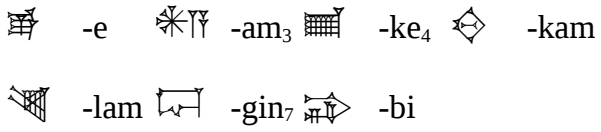
The lack of punctuation generates even severe problems on its own. Consider the short text *"Is she gone?", he said.* Now imagine a language that doesn't distinguish gender (like Sumerian), that has no written way to mark a question (like Sumerian) and remove the punctuation. You might end up with a text like *he went away he spoke* — from which it is hard to reconstruct the original meaning. The lack of quotation and question marks can become a severe issue in more complicated texts.

Often the original text on a clay tabled is organized in lines or otherwise separated spaces. This is meaningful structure, the lines separate phrases like titles that stand in apposition in a royal inscription — each title gets its own line. But it still doesn't help to find the verb or the start of a new sentence.

2.6.2 Telltales

One good way to get the structure of a sentence is to watch out for particular syllables. Remeber that grammatical structure like endings or infixes are always written syllabically — so when you recognize that a case ending is appended to some unknown sign, that unknown sign likely is a noun or adjective — because only they can receive case endings.

Here are some signs worth to look out for that help to identify nouns:



-e marks the ergative, **-am**$_3$ is the copula, **-ke**$_4$ marks a genitive phrase for ergative and is extremely common in royal and other votive inscriptions where long titles are recited, **-kam** and **-lam** are the result of a genitive phrase being used with the copula.

-gin$_7$ is the equative ending and usually helps to identify the preceding as a noun, and **-bi** does the same as either demonstrative (or a possessive) ending.

The verb can most of the time be identified by virtue of it having a conjugation prefix. So far, we've learned three of them, **im-**, **mu-** and **ba-**. Somewhat less often also **i**$_3$**-** and **bi**$_2$**-** are seen.

Especially a syllabic sequence like **mu-un-** or **ba-ab-** points to the start of a verbal chain. Alas, especially **bi**$_2$**-** can be deceptive, because it also has the syllabic readings **de**$_3$ and **ne** — *both of which* are also important for some common verb forms and it has the logogram reading of **izi** (fire) — which also is a fairly common word.

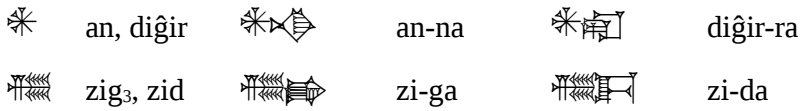
Trying to identify the grammar of a sentence in a first pass by looking for such telltale signs and syllabic readings usually gives a decent start with an unknown text.

2.6.3 Disambiguation

Some signs are literally overloaded with meaning — they have dozens of different logogram readings *and* they serve also to indicate common syllables. AN is a good example, it indicates divine names, is part of the compound sign to write the copula, reads **an** syllabically and can have the readings **an** 'heaven', **An** 'the god An' as well as **diĝir** 'god'.

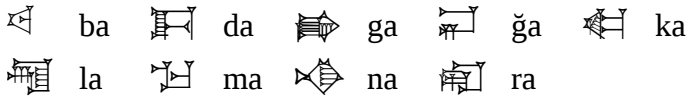
So how are we supposed to pick a reading when we see the sign in a text?

Case endings can give a clue. Remeber how the genitive 'picks up' the last consonant of a word? Without case endings, as object, we can't tell, but in genitive suddenly the reading is clear:



AN-na cannot possibly read ***diĝir-na*, it has to be **an-na**, and likewise with **diĝir-ra**. The verbs **zig**$_3$ 'to rise' and **zid** 'to be true' look identical — till the participle is formed, then **zi-ga** is distinct from **zi-da**. Picking up the consonant is an extremely valuable clue as to how a sign needs to be understood.

Memorize the following syllables well — they are common genitive endings with the different consonants picked up. Several of those you have already seen in the lesson text.



As an example for how to use disambiguation in practice, how would we break down the following (somewhat artifical) sentence that contains the AN sign multiple times?

On a first reading, you should recognize

- the second instance has the sequence **an-na** 'of heaven' or 'of An'

- the third instance is the compound sign for the copula
- the last instance is the sequence **diĝir-ra** 'of a god'

So the beginning must mean something like 'a god of heaven he is' or 'An of heaven he is' (we can't be sure). This is followed by 'king' and ended with 'of a god', so 'king of *something and* a god'. To break down the untranslated part, we could try the idea that there is a divine name indicated — and indeed, the phrase can be compared with a list of gods (see appendix G) and reads ^{d}**en-ki**, so this is the god Enki. We're left with a single AN sign — and might assign that a plural meaning, so the sentence comes out as 'An of heaven he is, king of Enki and all the gods'.

2.6.4 Looking up logograms

It's a quite normal state of affairs that you will encounter a sign which you can't read — so you have to look it up. But how? Unlike the Latin alphabet, cuneiform signs don't come in any natural order.

Egyptian hieroglyphs have lookup tables based on sign shape — birds, animals, humans, parts of the human body... — if you can recognize the category, you can find the sign quickly. This doesn't work for cuneiform because most signs are too abstract, it's impossible to tell what they might have originally depicted.

Japanese kanji are sorted according to the number of strokes used to draw them —but this doesn't work for cuneiform either, because in different times and different texts, the same sign might be drawn with a different number of stylus movements.

So, if you actually have to look up a sign, expect to browse through a list of several hundred signs (*Altbabylonische Zeichenliste* has 187 pages of 480 signs, the same sign drawn usually in five to ten different variants to account for style and time period) trying to find a match.

Naturally, this takes a fair share of time.

Never use a full academic sign list if you can avoid it — many resources come with either a transliteration (so you can get the reading of the sign from there) or their own sign list (e.g. Volk's *Sumerian Reader* has a sign list and a dictionary included) which is shorter and covers only the resource.

If you have any reading of the sign in question — even if you know that it's the wrong one for the text at hand — you're in a much better position. Using the reading, you can use the index of the sign list to find its number and then look at that number. The sign list then gives you a number of alternative readings. These you can try in a dictionary to see which fits into the context.

If that doesn't sound too attractive, the **electronic Babylonian Library** has a sign search feature

`https://www.ebl.lmu.de/signs/`

that is extremely useful - you can search a sign by any of its readings. Even if you don't know the index (you might know that a sign is read **e**, but you don't remember whether it was $\mathbf{e}_4$ or $\mathbf{e}_6$), you can try different indices fairly quickly. The information on the sign then lists not only the various readings but also the translation of common logogram meanings — so you even save consulting the dictionary.

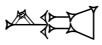
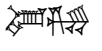
If you know nothing about a sign and can't find it in a list, just leave it be. There aren't so many cuneiform signs after all, eventually you're bound to come across it in a different

text. Even if it has a different reading there, that is enough. You only need one reading to identify and find it.

2.6.5 Sign list

Here are the new cuneiform signs needed to read the lesson text and the exercise.

Logogram and compound sign readings:

	URU	iri		EZENxBAD	bad_3
	LUGAL	lugal		ŠEŠ.AB	uri_5(m)
	KAK	du_3		LAGAB×HAL	nammu
	UŠ	nita		GA_2xAN	daĝal
	KAL	kala(g)		ŠUL-GI	šulgi
	SI	si		SAG	saĝ
	TUR	dumu		MAH	mah

Syllabic readings:

	BI	bi		HIxBAD	kam
	KID	ke_4		MU	mu
	UN	un		HI×A$Š_2$	hur
	DIM_2	gin_7		GA	ga
	NA	na		E	e
	BU	sir_2		LA	la
	KU_3	ku_3		IG	ĝal$_2$
	KA	ka			

2.6.6 Exercise

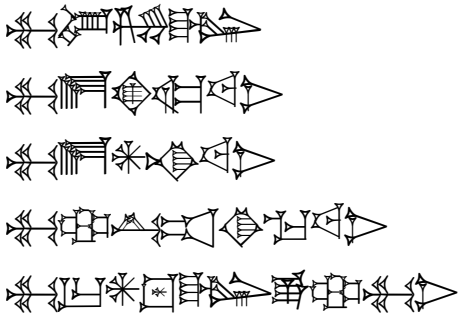
We're now in a position to start with simple cuneiform reading exercises — without a transliteration provided nearby.

The following are some (actual and invented) year names. The Sumerian calendar didn't have a zero point from which years could simply be counted, so the way years were marked

was that a name was given to them. Usually that name described a distinctive event which occurred in the year.

The form of the year names is always 'year (in which)…'

Read the following year names (you should know the words, names and even most phrases from the lesson):

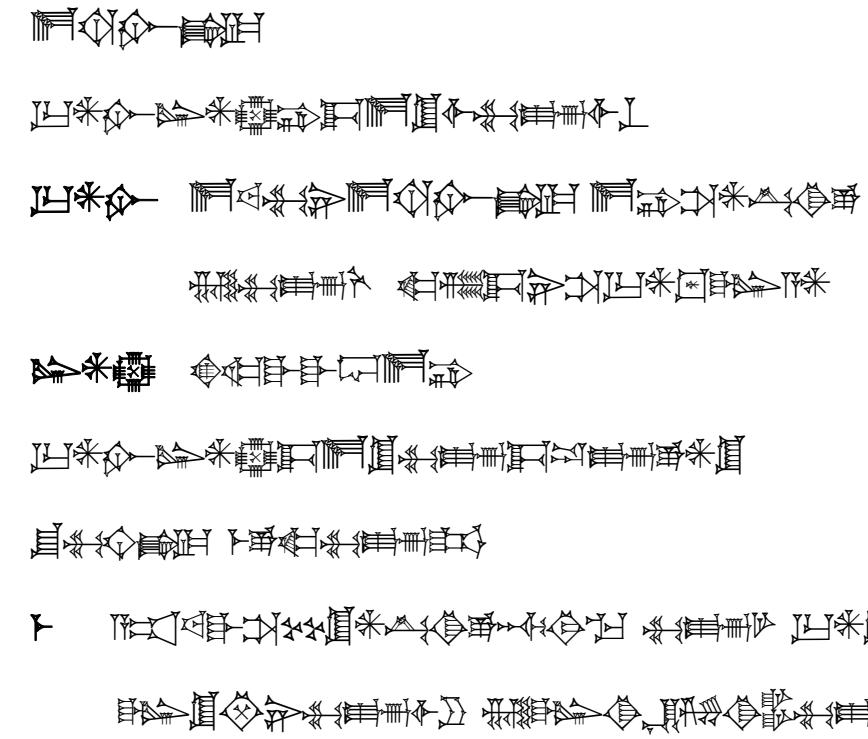


If you get stuck or want to check, appendix F has the answers.

Lesson 3

DIMENSIONAL CASES

3.1 TEXT



E_2-temen-ni-gu-ru

Ur-^{d}Iškur Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara-bi-da e$_2$-še$_3$ igi mu-un-sǐ-bar.

Ur-^{d}Iškur: e_2-ba mu-ni e$_2$-temen-ni-gu-ru. e$_2$-bi-ta ^{d}nanna-e nam mu-un-tar. inim zi-da-ni-ta Ur-^{d}Nammu lugal-am$_3$.

Lu$_2$-Šara: ḫur-saĝ gal-gal-gin$_7$ e$_2$-bi!

Ur-^{d}Iškur Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara-da e$_2$-še$_3$ mu-un-da-ĝen. uĝ$_3$-e an-še$_3$ šu mu-ub-il$_2$. išib-e gu$_3$ mu-un-de$_2$.

išib: a-ab-ba gal-ta kur-kur-še$_3$ ^{d}Nanna-e bala silim-ma mu-un-ĝar. ur-^{d}nammu lugal-še$_3$ ša$_3$-ni mu-un-pad$_3$. nam-lugal ki-en-gi ki-uri mu-un-šum$_2$.

The Etemenniguru

Ur-Iškur and Lu-šara were looking towards a temple.

Ur-iškur: The name of that temple is Etemenniguru. From that temple, Nanna decrees the fate. By his righteous word, Ur-Nammu is king.

Lu-šara Like a giant mountain this temple is!

Ur-Iškur walked with Lu-šara towards the temple.The people raised their hands towards heaven for prayer. A priest spoke.

Priest: From the great sea to the hills, Nanna has established a reign of peace. Ur-Nammu has he chosen in his heart as king. The kingship of Sumer and Akkad he has granted.

3.2 GRAMMAR

3.2.1 Compound verbs

Sumerian, quite like English, has a class of verbs that is composed of two words. Instead of just 'look' at something, you can 'cast a glance' — and Sumerian works pretty much the same. The actual verb always comes with its object. Using **igi** (eye) a Sumerian might say

igi mu-un-bar (he set his eye upon, i.e. he looked)

Whether each such compound verb really represent grammatically a verb or merely an interesting metaphor is a matter for academic debate.

In the dictionary, we list such verbs separated with a '—' as **igi — bar**. When they occur in a text, the first part is the object of the verb, the second part is grammatically the verb and gets the verbal chain. So for **šu — il$_2$** (to raise hands) we could form

šu mu-ub-il$_2$ (they raised their hands)

Because the first element of a compound verb is formally an object, it can in principle be qualified with an adjective (or otherwise):

igi zi-da mu-un-bar (he set his true eye upon)

3.2.2 The object pronoun paradigm in singular

We've learned that the subject of a transitive sentence in English becomes the ergative in Sumerian. But what about intransitive sentences? In the 3rd person, we could simply add it in translation as implied, as in **ba-ĝen** 'he went' or **ba-gub** 'he stood'. In 1st and 2nd person, it has to be marked by an ending **-(e)n**. If the verbal stem ends in a consonant

a dummy vowel **-e-** is used and usually the last consonant is picked up in writing — in particular when it is hidden:

Whether the ending means 'you' or 'I' can only be decided by context.

ba-gub-be$_2$-en (I stood, you stood)
im-ĝen-ne-en (I went, you went)
ba-sa$_6$-ge-en (I was beautiful)

If the verbal stem ends with a vowel, the ending repeats the vowel:

ba-si-in (I was filled)

In transitive sentences, the same ending conveys an object pronoun (we'll learn the set later) — this is a natural consequence of ergativity:

ba-an-ĝar-re-en (he (**-an-**) established me (**-en**)

3.2.3 More on verbal prefixes

We've previously learned that a Sumerian verb *must* add a conjugation prefix to the stem to act as a verb. So far, we've seen the elements **im-**, **mu-** and **ba-** in that role. But it would be a mistake to think that all these elements would be equal.

im- and **mu-** are actually two forms of the same element **-m-** that is dressed up with a vowel to pronounce it better (this is a theme that will re-occur quite a few times), called the *ventive element*.

- **im-** is the form used before the verbal root, before elements starting with **b-** and before the dimensional infixes **-ta-, -da-** and **ši-** (to be discussed in the following sections)
- **mu-** is the form used elsewere

The ventive element tends to be associated with actions of an agent, verbs of motion and a direction towards the speaker.

im-ĝen (he came here)
mu-un-de$_6$ (he brought it here)

The element **ba-** seems to have originated from an impersonal dative prefix, but the range of its use has clearly expanded. In practice, it often means the opposite of the ventive element, it tends to be associated with agentless actions, verbs of state and a directional nuance away from the speaker.

ba-gub (he stood)
ba-ĝen (he went away)
ba-an-de$_6$ (he took it away)
ba-du$_3$ (it was built)

Since both these prefixes express nuances which modify the verbal meaning slightly, it stands to reason that a neutral meaning is implied by not using any prefix.

That is indeed possible if a pronoun or other element comes before the verbal root. So far we've seen how the ergative can be resumed with **-Vn-** or **-Vb-**. The general rule is that an **i-** is inserted if no pronoun is before the root or if the pronoun requires a leading vowel to produce a neutral nuance. If the **i-** is not linked with a pronoun consonant, it is written with the **i**$_3$ sign, otherwise syllabically.

i_3-ĝen (he went, no pronoun)
in-du_6 (he carried it, -n- as prefix)
ib_2-du_6 (they carried it, -b- as prefix)
i_3-du_3 (it was built, no pronoun)

Because the **i-** is in essence a meaningless dummy vowel, it is consistently dropped in contexts where it is not needed.

3.2.4 The dimensional cases

Comitative

Sumerian has three cases which describe as their primary function spatial relationships, therefore they can be dubbed *dimensional cases*. They all have very similar grammar. The first of those is the comitative. It describes a relation of one thing being *next to* or *with* another.

The case ending of the comitative is **-da** and it applies without compliations.

lugal dub-sar-da ba-gub. (The king stood with a scribe)
bad_3 e_2-da ba-du_3. (The wall was built next to a temple)

The comitative can be resumed in the verbal chain, the relevant infix is **-da-** and it precedes the resumed ergative. As with any other cases, resuming is essentially optional, a case marker has to be only once in the sentence, it can be with the noun or with the verb.

lugal dub-sar im-da-gub. (The king stood with a scribe)

Resuming can be done with pronouns — for a personal 3rd person **-n-** is used before the infix, for impersonal **-b-**. The vowel is chosen according to the preceding syllable:

lugal dub-sar mu-un-da-gub. (The king stood with a scribe)
bad_3 e_2-da ba-ab-da-du_3. (The wall was built next to a temple)
bad_3 ba-ab-da-du_3. (The wall was built *next to it* **-ab-da-**))

Ablative

The ablative describes in its primary sense *from where* something comes — it implies a distance in space or time. Possibly derived from that is an *instrumental* meaning, the case describes *by what means* some event is coming to pass.

The ending of the ablative is **-ta** and it, too, applies without complication. When it is resumed, an infix **-ta-** is used in the verbal chain.

lugal e_2-ta mu-ub-ta-ĝen. (The king went away from the temple.)
gi-dub-ba-ta dub-sar mu-ub-ta-an-sar. (The scribe writes with a stylus.)
dub-sar mu-ub-ta-sar. (The scribe writes *with it* (**-ub-ta-**)).
u_4-bi-ta dub-sar-me-en (From that day on, I was a scribe.)
me ^{d}nin-ĝir$_2$-su-ka-ta lugal-me-en! (By the power of Ningirsu I am king!)

(Note in the last example that the name ^{d}**nin-ĝir$_2$-su** 'lord of Girsu' already has a genitive end hence ends in a hidden **-k** — which becomes visible when a second genitive ('*of* Ningirsu') is used that adds an **-a** — to which then the ending **-ta** is finally appended.)

Terminative

The last of the three dimensional cases, the terminative, describes a point *towards* which something moves or evolves, be it in time or space. In particular, with verbs of observation or attention, it describes that which is observed. Somewhat more abstract, the case also describes the result of an evolution or change, for instance the office *into which* someone has been appointed.

The terminative ending is **-še**$_3$ and, unlike the other two dimensional cases, it doesn't resume with the same form, it resumes with **-ši-**.

> lugal iri-še$_3$ im-ši-g̃en (The king went to the city.)
> igi e$_2$-še$_3$ mu-ub-ši-in-bar (He looked towards the temple.)
> u$_4$-bi-še$_3$ (until that day)
> lugal-e sa$_3$ dub-sar-še$_3$ mu-un-ši-pad$_3$ (The king has chosen him as scribe.)

Dimensional cases and the noun chain

Like other case endings, the dimensional cases always come *last* in the noun chain. If the noun chain involves a genitive phrase, the dimensional endings *follow* the genitive ending. Note that all dimensional case endings start with consonants, so they never lead to the appearance of the genitive **-k-** (in essence they can just be appended to the genitive):

> iri lugal-la-ta (from the city of the king)
> e$_2$ dumu-še$_3$ (to the house of the son)
> dub-sar lugal gal-bi-da (with the scribe of this great king)

If the noun chain contains an apposition, any case ending is used at the end of the whole chain (i.e. not separately for each part).

> Ur-^{d}Iškur dub-sar-da (with Ur-Iškur the scribe)

Resuming dimensional cases

Note again that there is an interesting difference between resuming ergative and resuming a dimensional case: The ergative, if resumed, is *always* resumed with a pronoun, in **mu-un-sar** 'he wrote' **-un** expressed *both* ergative and 3rd person sg.

This is not so for the dimensional cases, in **ba-an-da-an-gub** 'he stood with him' the **-an-da-** expresses the pronoun **-an-** and the case **-da-** separately — and it is in fact possible to leave out the pronoun (it is not possible to leave out the case marker and end with ***ba-an-an-gub*).

What does a form like **im-ta-g̃en** mean then?

If a noun in ablative is found elsewhere in the sentence, this is a permissible (pronounless) way to resume it in the verbal chain. However, if not, the form expresses a directional nuance, somewhat stronger than the ventive element can. So it could be translated 'he went away'.

An even stronger nuance can be obtained by using **ba-** in the same meaning — **ba-ta-g̃en**. It is by actively using the case elements that can be resumed that Sumerian manages to express verb nuances that are not readily apparent to an English speaker.

Note also that only *one* of the three dimensional cases may be resumed in a single verbal chain. Hence **eden-ta iri-še**$_3$ **mu-un-ta-g̃en** or **eden-ta iri-še**$_3$ **mu-un-ši-g̃en** are correct Sumerian, but *eden-ta iri-še*$_3$ ***mu-un-ta-ši-g̃en* is not.

3.2.5 3rd person possessive

Possessive pronouns by and large mirror the range of meaning of the genitive — they tell about origin as in 'his father', professional relationships as in 'his scribe' or just plain possession 'his tablet'. In Sumerian, such possessives are endings appended to nouns.

The Sumerian 3rd person personal possessive suffix is **-(a)ni** 'his', the impersonal is **-bi** 'its' (this is another function of the form). If a noun ends with a consonant, the form **-ani** is written (usually syllabically as **-a-ni**, if it ends in a vowel, just **-ni** is used.

Note that the form **-bi** can actually translate as 'their' as well if it refers to a collective — which has impersonal gender.

dub-a-ni (his writing tablet)
udu-ni (his sheep)
mu-bi (its name)
udu-bi (their sheep)

In the noun chain, the possessive occupies the same spot as the demonstrative does (and both can't occur at the same time), i.e. after the adjective but before any case endings.

dub gal-a-ni (his large writing tablet)

3.2.6 Anticipatory genitive

Sumerian has a fairly common construction that uses a possessive ending to invert the order of a genitive phrase, i.e. rather than 'the scribe of the king' the phrase is changed to 'of the king, his scribe'. Because the noun chain with the genitive ending comes first and *anticipates* the noun it determines, this is called *anticipatory genitive*.

lugal-la mu gal-a-ni ('of the king, his great name')

What makes this tricky to translate is that the first part may not have an open genitive ending at all (because that is absent when the chain ends in a vowel), so it may look like there is no genitive involved at all.

ğir$_2$-su^{ki} lugal-bi ('the king of Girsu')

3.2.7 Sumerian 'and'

In general, Sumerian is quite fine with listing things or persons next to each other — essentially as something like a comma-separated list with the comma being unwritten.

The ending **-bi-da** 'with, at the side of' can often be translated as 'and'. Frequently, this ending is shortened to **-da** or **-bi** (this would be a third meaning of that particular ending) without a change in meaning.

nita munus-bi-da (man and woman)
eden kur-da (steppe and hill)
lugal dumu-ni-da (the king and (**-da-**) his (**-ni-**) son)

Note an interesting twist here — in English, two words linked by 'and' become plural. But the Sumerian expression really means 'together with' — so the resulting expression really remains singular.

An Akkadian loanword, **u**$_3$ 'and' can be used like in English as alternative.

3.3 VOCABULARY

Sumerian	English
a-ab-ba	ocean, sea
an	heaven
bala	reign, term of office
de_2	to pour out
de_6	to carry, bring
gi-dub-ba	stylus
gu_3	voice
gu_3 — de_2	to speak
g̃ar	to establish, place
igi — bar	to look at
išib	priest (possibly exorcist)
ki-en-gi(r)	Sumer
ki-uri	Akkad
kur	hill
nam	fate
nam-lugal	kingship
nam — tar	to decree a fate
$ša_3$	heart
$ša_3$ — pad_3	to propose, choose
šu — il_2	to raise hands, pray
$šum_2$	to give
tar	to decree, decide, cut
u_4	day
$ug̃_3$	people
zi(d)	true, right, to be right

3.4 CONVERSATION — ON THE ROAD

You already know how to greet someone and introduce yourself when you meet a traveller on the road. Now, let's look at a few phrases for smalltalk.

me-$še_3$ g̃en-ne-en? (To where are you going?)

asks for the destination of the other traveller.

me-ta g̃en-ne-en? (From where have you come?)

asks for the origin of the journey. The English 'where are you from?' however asks for something different — the nationality. In Sumerian, you might ask that with

me-a ba-tu-de_3-en? (Where were you born?)

You might answer that with

dumu uri_5^{ki}-ma-me-en (I'm a citizen of Ur.)

and the above questions with something like

kur-ma-gan-ta ba-ta-g̃en-ne-en (I've travelled from the hills of Magan)

If you're lost, you could try to ask something like

kaskal-bi $nibru^{ki}$-$še_3$? (Is this the road to Nippur?)

(as a side note, Sumerian apparently asks yes/no questions just by intonation, so they're not readily apparent as questions when written in cuneiform — in the transliteration we can add question marks of course).

If you can't proceed, someone might tell you

kaskal nibru^{ki}-še$_3$ ba-keš$_2$ (The road to Nippur is blocked)

If you have to cross a river, you might ask

me-a niĝbalbal-am$_3$? (Where is a crossing?)

Sumerian directions you might hear in return are **zag** 'right' or **gab$_2$-bu** 'left'. The directions of the compass are **mir** 'north', **sig** 'south', **mar-tu** 'west' and **kur** 'east', but in actual reality they were expressed as 'winds', so **im-mir** would be the direction of the north wind and denote a quadrant rather than a precise bearing.

Using **eger [place]-še$_3$** the idea of 'behind' can be expressed, e.g.

niĝbalbal eger kur-še$_3$-am$_3$ (the crossing is behind the hill)

Some useful words: ĝiri$_3$ (way, path), kaskal (road), addir (ford), niĝbalbal (crossing), iri (city), eš$_3$ (shrine), e$_2$-gal (palace), kur (hill), id$_2$ (river), eg$_2$ (levee, canal), tir (forest), eden (plain, steppe), ambar (marsh). a-ab-ba (sea)

3.5 PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Translate the following expressions into English: a) lugal-la bala-ni b) diĝir-e e$_2$-ta nam mu-un-tar c) dub ba-an-de$_6$ d) dub mu-un-de$_6$ d) lugal-e Ur-^{d}Iškur dub-sar-še$_3$ im-ši-in-ĝar

Exercise 2: Translate the following expressions into Sumerian: a) towards the scribe b) from that great plain c) he stood with his wife d) he looked at the hill e) the troops of Ur raised the hands f) man and woman g) by divine power h) I was found

Exercise 3: Write as *anticipatory* genitive: a) e$_2$ iri b) dumu dub-sar-ra c) mu udu d) gu$_3$ ša$_3$ zi-da

Exercise 4: Write the verb for the given root, fully resuming the information of the preceding sentence. As a bonus, try to pick the most suitable conjugation prefix.

a) eden-ta lugal [ĝen]

b) dam-a-ni-da dub-sar [gub]

c) lu2-e dub dumu-ni-da e$_2$-še$_3$ [de$_6$]

d) uĝ$_3$-e lugal-še igi [bar]

Exercise 5: Translate and find the correct verbal ending:

a) From that day, I stood.

b) You walked to a wide river.

c) You were beautiful like a lady.

3.6 READING CUNEIFORM

3.6.1 Disambiguation

If you've tried to transliterate the text of the first lesson, you might have come across a curious observation. The same cuneiform sign DU covers the verbs 'to go, walk', 'to stand' as well as 'to bring':

 DU ĝen, gub, de$_6$

Now, you don't need to think of traffic lights to see that confusing these readings can be dangerous — for an army, it is a difference whether it advances or holds the position.

Yet the inventors of the script evidently didn't think assigning the same sign for these verbs would ever be a problem — it would have been relatively easy to just use a different sign.

Why didn't this happen? Part of it certainly has to do with historical reasons and established patterns, but if it had been an actual problem, surely in hundreds of years someone would have fixed it.

Chances are that verbs are distinguished not only by logical but by grammatical context — conjugation prefixes as well as resumed dimensional infixes. The logic would then go 'nobody would ever say **?mu-ub-ši-in-gub** or **?ba-de$_6$**' — while these expressions are grammatically possible, they make little sense logically (this is perhaps similar to how we could use logic and context to keep apart different meanings of 'mouse' (small animal vs. computer pointing device) apart — the word is literally the same, yet usually there is no confusion).

Thus, just like case endings with picked up consonants can help to determine the correct reading for nouns, the verbal chain with its presence or absence of conjugation prefixes and resumed dimensional infixes can provide hints about the correct reading of verbal stem signs.

3.6.2 Dimensional case endings

Just like the genitive endings, the form in which the dimensional case endings and their resuming counterparts in the verbal chain are written ist rather characteristic and helps to identify nouns as well as to establish the general structure of the sentence.

 ta  še$_3$  da  ši

If you find them behind a conjugation prefix, you're probably looking at a verbal chain, otherwise they mark noun chains for a case. Also the pronouns that go with the resumed case markers inside the verb can be a tell-tale:

 ab  ib$_2$  ub  an  in  un

(When the conjugation prefix is **mu-**, you expect the forms **mu-un-** or **mu-ub-**, when it is **ba-** rather **ba-an-** or **ba-ab-** and when there is no particular prefix **in-** or **ib$_2$-**.)

3.6.3 Sign list

Logograms and compound sign readings:

	IGI	igi		IL_2	il_2
	BAR	bar		GU_2	gu_2
	UN	uĝ		DE_2	de_2
	AN	an		SUM_2	$šum_2$
	ŠU	šu		KUR	kur
	BAL	bala		GAR	gar
	$ŠA_3$	$ša_3$		IGI.RU	pad_3
	DU	de_6		KA	gu_3
	TAR	tar		NAM	nam
	ME	išib			

Syllabic readings:

	DA	da		$EŠ_2$	$še_3$
	NI	ni, i_3		UN	un
	UB	ub		AB	ab
	TA	ta		IGI	ši
	IN	in		TUM	ib_2

3.6.4 Votive inscriptions

Royal inscriptions dedicating something — be it a building or an object — to a deity are among the easiest cuneiform texts to read. They also are fairly numerous, photographs can be found on Wikipedia and chances are you can see an original in a museum. Such dedication texts can be called *votive inscriptions*.

Their structure is fairly generic. They start with the deity to which the dedication is made in dative (see 5.2.1) — we haven't covered this case and its ending yet, but this doesn't really matter because more often than not, the case marker isn't actually written. The text then continue to name the dedicator (in ergative case — this usually is written), followed by the object of the dedication and at the end comes the verb.

What makes this structure difficult to see is that deity and dedicator usually appear as long phrases composed of apposition of genitive phrases (as titles usually do - 'protector of the seven seas, overlord of the empire, defender of the one true faith...') — so both the deity and the dedicator can be several lines long.

The sequence **mu-na-** 'he (did) for him' as the start of the verbal chain is fairly common and characteristic and usually allows to spot the verb quickly.

3.6.5 Exercise

The following reading exercise is a reproduction of an original tablet - if you insert the number into the CDLI search engine

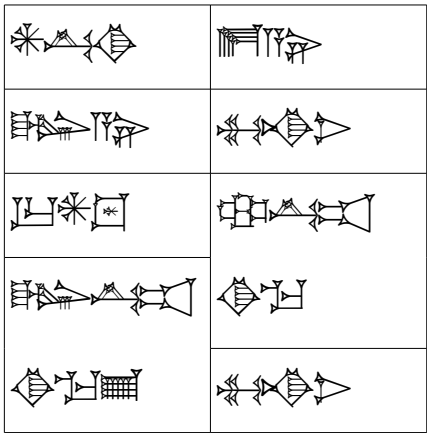
`https://cdli.earth/search`

you can see a photograph of the original artifact.

The tablet is divided into a number of fields. Inside each field, the reading direction is from left to right and from upper line to lower line, but the arrangement of the fields is such that you're supposed to read first the left column and when you have reached the bottom, you start with the right column (just like a modern newspaper in fact).

The text is a votive inscription. Most of the phrases you should have seen by now.

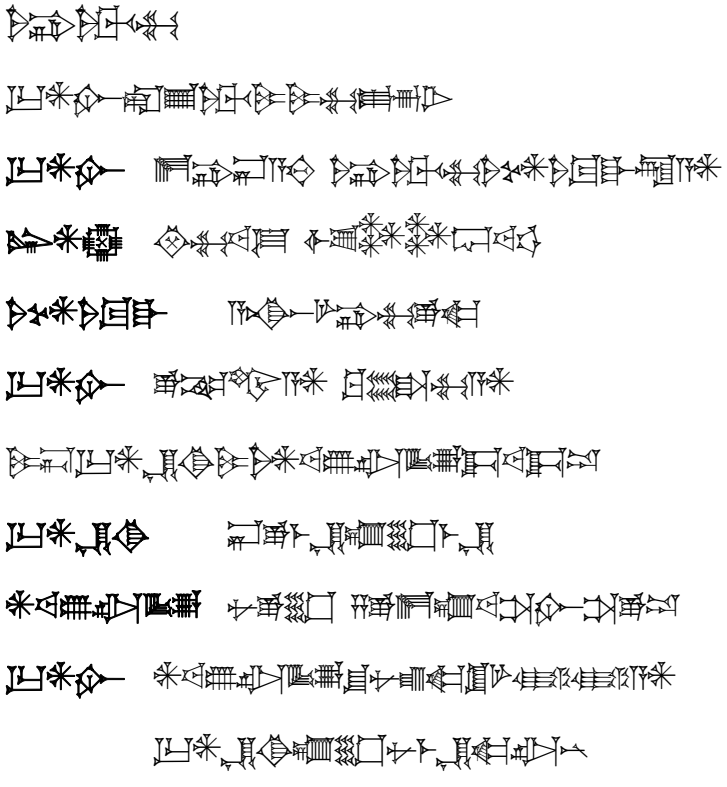
P227153



Lesson 4

PRONOUNS, NEGATION

4.1 TEXT



Munus-bi dam-gu$_{10}$

Ur-^{d}Iškur-ra-ke$_4$ dam dumu dumu mu-un-tuku.

Ur-^{d}Iškur: e$_2$-bi ĝa$_2$-a-kam. Munus-bi dam-gu$_{10}$ Geme$_2$-^{d}Nin-gal-la-am$_3$.

Lu-$^{d}_{2}$-Šara: ša$_3$-gu$_{10}$ ba-hul$_2$. igi-zu mul-mul-gin$_7$ ba-zalag.

Geme$_2$-^{d}Nin-gal: a-na-aš niĝ$_2$-bi mu-e-du$_{11}$?

Ur-^{d}Iškur: e-ne nar-am$_3$. ku-li-gu$_{10}$-am$_3$

Dumu-nita Ur-^{d}En-ki dumu-munus ^{d}Ba-u$_2$-al-sa$_6$-da ba-da-ĝen.

Ur-^{d}En-ki: ĝa$_2$-e-me-en dub-sar-me-en!

^{d}Ba-u$_2$-al-sa$_6$: Nu-e-sar! Za-e e$_2$-dub-ba-ta im-ta-e-ĝen!

Ur-Iškur: ^{d}Ba-u$_2$-al-sa$_6$ - šu nu-luḫ ka-še$_3$ niĝ$_2$ gig-gig-am$_3$! Ur-^{d}En-ki, dub-sar nu-me-en! Inim al-til.

This woman is my wife

Ur-Iškur has a wife and children.

Ur-Iškur: This is my house. And this woman is my wife, Geme-Ningal.

Lu-Šara: My heart is full of joy. Your eyes shine like the stars!

Geme-Ningal: Why do you say such a thing?

Ur-Iškur: This one, he is a musician…He is my guest.

The boy Ur-Enki and the girl Bau-alsa came.

Ur-Enki: I am a scribe!

Bau-alsa: You're not! You, you came just from school!

Ur-Iškur: Bau-alsa, bringing an unwashed hand to your mouth is a very bad thing! Ur-Enki, you're not a scribe. Matter closed!

4.2 GRAMMAR

4.2.1 Independent personal pronouns

Sumerian has a set of independent personal pronouns (i.e. pronouns that are not expressed as endings or forms resumed inside the verbal chain).

Most of the time, the verb can, by resuming with the appropriate pronoun, express everything quite adequately, so independent pronouns are usually not needed. If they appear, they usually do so for clarity or emphasis. The set of pronouns looks as follows:

Subject	Singular	Plural
1. Person	ĝa$_2$-e (I)	me-en-de$_3$-en (we)
2. Person	za-e (you)	me-en-ze$_2$-en (you)
3. Person	e-ne (he, she)	e-ne-ne (they)

Grammatically the pronouns count as nouns, i.e. they can be part of a noun chain. However, note that the genitive of an independent pronoun is conceptually the *possessive pronoun* (see next section), so usually they would not receive the genitive ending.

They can however (and frequently do) receive the copula ending, and in such sentences, they can also receive genitive endings, again for emphasis. In this case, the **-e-** is dropped or changed to **-a-**.

e$_2$-bi ĝa$_2$-a-kam (this house is of me, i.e. this is my house)

If they receive other case endings, they may shed the **-e** or change it into an **-a-**:

za-e dub-sar-me-en ĝa$_2$-e lugal-me-en (you are scribe, but I am king)
ĝa$_2$-a-ta ba-ta-an-ĝen (he went away from me)
za-da i$_3$-da-an-gub (he stood with you)

A table of forms can be found in appendix D.

4.2.2 Possessive pronouns

In essence, possessive pronouns are pronouns in genitive — 'my tablet' is conceptually the same as 'the tablet of me'. Sumerian possessive pronouns are endings. We've already learned the 3rd person endings **-(a)-ni** (his) and **-bi** (its), now we take a look at the full table:

Subject	Singular	Plural
1. Person	-g̃u$_{10}$ (my)	-me (our)
2. Person	-zu (your)	-zu-ne-ne (your)
3. Person (p)	-(a)-ni (his, her)	-(a)-ne-ne (their)
3. Person (i)	-bi (its)	—

Dimensional case endings can be applied to these pronouns without complications, but sometimes the variant forms **-Vš** with vowel harmony instead of **še**$_3$ are found:

dam-g̃u$_{10}$-da (with my wife)
e$_2$-zu-uš (to your house)
iri-ni-iš (to his city)

The ergative case ending **-e** is absorbed by all the final vowels except **-i** — which is changed into **-e**:

lugal-a-ne$_2$ e$_2$ mu-un-du$_3$ (his king built the temple)
dub-sar-be$_2$ mu mu-un-sar (their scribe wrote the text)

(The usage of **ne**$_2$ and **be**$_2$ is a plausible conjecture based on the idea that the **-e** would be *spoken* — **ne**$_2$ and **ni** are written with the same cuneiform sign and so are **be**$_2$ and **bi** — so there is no written evidence that can decide either way.)

A table of forms can be found in appendix D.

4.2.3 Personal pronouns in the verbal chain

We have already learned the 3rd person pronouns for dimensional cases and ergative in the verbal chain. The complete chart for the dimensional cases is as follows:

Subject	Singular	Plural
1. Person	mu-	—
2. Person	e-	—
3. Person (p)	-n-	-ne-
3. Person (i)	-b-	—

The 1st person sg. **mu-** is identical with the ventive element and therefore cannot occur together with it. While the 1st and 2nd person can stand in front, all other forms need a conjugation prefix of some sort — or a vowel.

mu-da-g̃en (he stood with me)
ba-e-da-g̃en (he stood with you)

The complete table for the ergative pronouns reads as follows:

Subject	Singular	Plural
1. Person	-∅-	—
2. Person	e-	—
3. Person (p)	-n-	-n—Vš
3. Person (i)	-b-	—

The 1st person sg. is characterized by the *omission* of any written resumed element. Since resuming is optional, this seems more ambiguous than it really is. At least if the ventive element is prefixed, **im-g̃ar** 'it was placed' where the ventive element appears as **im-** because it comes directly before the root is different from **mu-g̃ar** 'I placed it' where the ventive element **mu-** is separated from the root **g̃ar** by an unwritten 1st person marker.

In the 3rd person plural, the pronoun marker is actually split around the root. So **mu-un-g̃ar-aš** would be 'they placed it'.

Appendix B has verb paradigms showing examples of all the pronominal forms.

4.2.4 Negation

Sumerian negation is done via the (quite broadly applicable) prefix **nu-**. Usually it is applied to the verb, and here it belongs to a class of elements that can be termed *model prefixes* (just as in the case of conjugation prefixes, the name is somewhat contentious) and such modal prefixes come *before* the conjugation prefixes.

Thus, if **mu-un-sar** means 'he wrote it', **nu-mu-un-sar** changes the meaning to 'he did not write it'.

Of course, nothing is quite as simple in Sumerian — if the element comes before **ba-**, it changes to **la-**, so **la-ba-uš**$_2$ then means 'he didn't die' (and if it comes before **bi**$_2$, to be discussed later in section 6.2.1, it changes to **li-**).

Now, remember that **i** as prefixed vowel in any form is just a dummy inserted because there is nothing else. So if we want to change **in-da-g̃en** 'he went with him' into a negated form, the **i** simply drops out and we get **nu-un-da-g̃en** 'he did not go with him'.

The same element can also negate the copula:

nu-um (he is not)
nu-me (I am not, you are not)
nu-me-eš (they are not)

Occasionally, **nu** is even treated akin to a verbal root:

uri$_5^{ki}$ in-nu (Ur did not exist)

4.2.5 The stative

The stative describes an agentless, unchanging and enduring realization of the action described by the verbal root. With few exceptions, the stative prefix **al-** doesn't permit any other elements in the verbal chain.

inim al-til (the matter is closed)
^{d}ba-u$_2$ al-sa$_6$ (Bau is good)
al-sed (it is cold)

4.2.6 *The generic participle*

We've mentioned before that the verbal root can function as a kind of participle, indicating the verbal action without regard to time or completion. In that function, it often occurs in compounds such as **dub-sar** 'one who writes on a tablet' and describes habits, character traits or states.

Note that because Sumerian is an ergative language, trying to make a distinction between active and passive participles (i.e. 'having written' vs. 'having been written') is meaningless. Any Sumerian participle can be translated as active or passive dependent on context.

> niĝ$_2$-tuku (having things, i.e. rich)
> ka nu-luḫ (an unwashed mouth)
> niĝ$_2$-ba-e ki aĝ$_2$ (loving gifts, i.e. corrupt)

4.3 VOCABULARY

Sumerian	English
a-na-aš	why?
du$_{11}$	to say, speak
e$_2$-dub-ba	school
ensi$_2$	governor
gi$_4$	to return, restore
gig	painful, bad
ḫul$_2$	to rejoice
igi	eye
inim	word, matter, affair
ka	mouth
ki — aĝ$_2$	to love
ku-li	friend
luḫ	to wash
mul	star
niĝ$_2$	thing, something
niĝ$_2$-ba	gift
pa — e$_3$	to cause to appear
sed	to be cold
šu	hand
tuku	to have, to possess
zalag	to shine

4.4 CONVERSATION — THE FAMILY

When meeting a traveler, after exchanging information about your journeys and yourself, you might want to talk about your family. With a phrase like

> lu$_2$ dam-tuku/dam-nu-tuku-me-en. (I am married/unmarried.)

you can describe your marital situation (or, with a small alteration, tell about children). You can introduce family members like

> dam-ĝu$_{10}$ mu-a-ni N.N.-am$_3$ (My wife's name is N.N.)

If you have several children, the oldest is referred to as **dumu saĝ** in Sumerian. **dumu-munus** and **dumu-nita** can distinguish between a daughter and a son respectively.

Should your family no longer be complete, a phrase like

a-a-g̃u$_{10}$ ba-uš$_2$ (My father died.)

can be used to tell about it.

Some useful words: ama (mother), a-a (father), dumu (child), dam (spouse), nin$_9$ (sister), šeš (brother), ama-gal (grandmother), ad-ad-da (grandfather), nu-ma-kuš (widow), nu-siki (orpan)

4.5 PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Translate the following expressions into English: a) ku-li-g̃u$_{10}$ b) ka-zu c) inim-a-ne-ne d) d) g̃a$_2$-e lugal-me-en e) šeš tur lugal-g̃a f) ša$_3$-g̃u$_{10}$ ba-ḫul g) niğ niğ gal mu-tuku h) nu-e-ğar

Exercise 2: Translate the following expressions into Sumerian a) your city b) their governor c) his gift d) you have washed your hand e) the eyes of my wife f) I have returned the gift

Exercise 3: Negate the following sentences:

a) mu-da-an-gub

b) dumu sub-sar-ra-kam

c) lugal-e e$_2$ in-du$_3$

d) igi mu-ši-e-bar

e) šu-ni in-luḫ

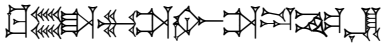
f) ba-an-da-gub-be$_2$-en

4.6 READING CUNEIFORM

4.6.1 Identifying roots

Both the Sumerian noun and the verb tend to form long chains when building sentences. From the point of view of looking up unknown words in a dictionary, this is anything but optimal — even if you have a syllabic reading of a string of syllables, you still need to decide where to chop it into pieces.

Let's consider an example:



If you apply the wisdom of the last lessons, you should recognize that there are two possible conjugation prefixes of **mu / im** and two instances of **ta** in the sentence.

Now, which is the verb? Because verbs are usually last in the sentence, it stands to reason that the second sequence is the start of a verb with conjguation prefix **im-** and resumed **-ta-** — which would make the first **-ta** a case ending that marks the ending of the noun chain.

Thus, there is a general idea of the structure of the sentence emerging.

Reading the first sequence syllabically yields **ku-li-mu-ta** and that must mean 'away from a *kulimu*' — which leaves the question of what exactly that is. If you try this in ePSD however, you won't get any match — because there's still an ending attached to it.

So a good rule when dealing with a Sumerian dictionary (especially online) is — when you look for a noun, try stripping endings from it — when you look for a verb, try stripping prefixes from it. We might then try 'kuli' as search term, eliminating an ending.

Unfortunately, there might still more care reuqired — searching for 'kuli' in ePSD produces a unit of measurement, only 'ku-li' gives a hit to **guli** 'friend' (different dictionaries differ in whether this should be read **ku-li** or **gu-li** — unfortunately a fairly normal state of affairs as far as Sumerian is concerned) - so it's always worth trying a few variations!

Then what about the ending **-mu**? When this sign is in a noun chain, it usually has a different reading **-gu**$_{10}$ — it is how the first person possessive pronoun is written. Thus a *kulimu* turns out to be 'my friend'.

This leaves the verb, and the sign after the start of the verbal chain **im-ta-** is an extremely common verbal root you should recignize — the sign DU reads **gub** 'to stand', **g̃en** 'to go' or **de**$_6$ 'to bring'. Since we don't have any actor (the only noun carries a case ending and reads 'from my friend'), we can rule out a meaning 'bring', and the resumed **-ta-** in the verb chain makes 'to stand' unlikely — which leaves 'to go'.

That is an intransitive verb — which might mark what the English subject is as direct object in the ending — and indeed the ending reads syllabically **-ne-en** which fits with a picked up consonant from **g̃en** and the ending **-en**.

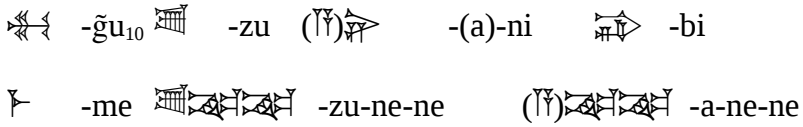
The sentence thus reads **ku-li-g̃u**$_{10}$**-ta im-ta-g̃en-ne-en** 'I went away from my friend' (or 'you went away from my friend', only context can tell).

Thus, by chopping away bits and pieces from the noun and verbal chains, we can in the end find the relevant elements that need to be looked up — but the process requires some thought. It would be a mistake, for instance, to take the last sign of the verbal chain as the root — that is often the case, but verbs can have endings just as well.

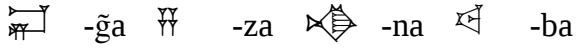
4.6.2 Possessive pronouns

Just as it is with the dimensional case endings and the verbal prefixes, learning to recognize which signs are typically used to write the possessive pronouns can be a big help in analyzing noun chains.

Pay attention to the following signs and combinations:



This, unfortunately, is not the end of the story. While most case endings are appended to the possessives as extra syllables, genitive and locative (the latter will be discussed in 6.2.1) are not. Both change the final vowel of the singular ending to **-a**— which in transliteration is easy to spot. In cuneiform however, the signs used to express possessive look completely different:



4.6.3 Sign list

Logograms and compound sign readings:

	SAL	munus		DAM	dam
	TUK	tuku		SAL.KUR	geme$_2$
	HUL$_2$	hul$_2$		3xAN	mul
	UD	zalag		KA	du$_{11}$, ka, inim
	ŠU	šu		LUH	luh
	GIG	gig		TIL	til
	GI$_4$	gi$_4$			

Syllabic readings:

	GA$_2$	ĝa		MU	ĝu$_{10}$
	ZU	zu		AŠ	aš
	LI	li		KU	ku
	KI	ki		AL	al
	U$_2$	u$_2$		ZA	za
	NU	nu		PA	pa
	GIR$_2$	gir$_2$		SU	su

4.6.4 Typical phrases of votive inscriptions

We've seen in the last reading exercise that Ur-Nammu wanted to let it be known that he built a temple and walls. This isn't the only accomplishment that rulers put on votive inscriptions on tablets, bricks or clay cones.

Typically, highly formal and set phrases are used here. For instance

> **id$_2$ mu-na-ba-al** (he dredged the river for N.N.)
> **ki-bi mu-na-gi$_4$** (he restored [it] to its (proper) place for N.N.)
> **niğ$_2$-ul-e pa mu-na-e$_3$** (he made old cultic things shine again for N.N.)
> **a mu-na-ru** (he dedicated [it] for N.N.)

are fairly commonly seen.

4.6.5 Exercise

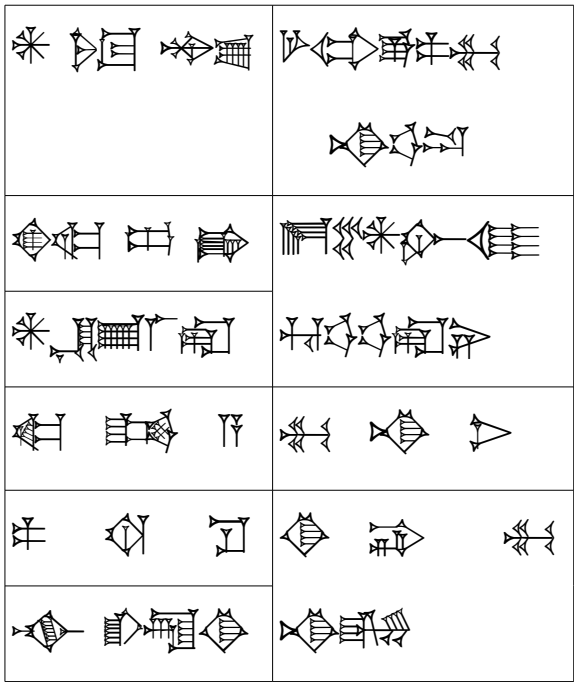
Also this reading exercise is a reproduction of an original clay cone - if you insert the number into the CDLI search engine

`https://cdli.earth/search`

you can see a photograph of the artifact.

The text is a votive inscription, this time by Gudea. Apart from typical votive phrases, it contains the name of the temple **e_2-ninnu anzu** ^{musen} **babbar** 'house of fifty of the shining Anzu-bird' - you're not expected to figure out every part of the name at this stage, just recognize it.

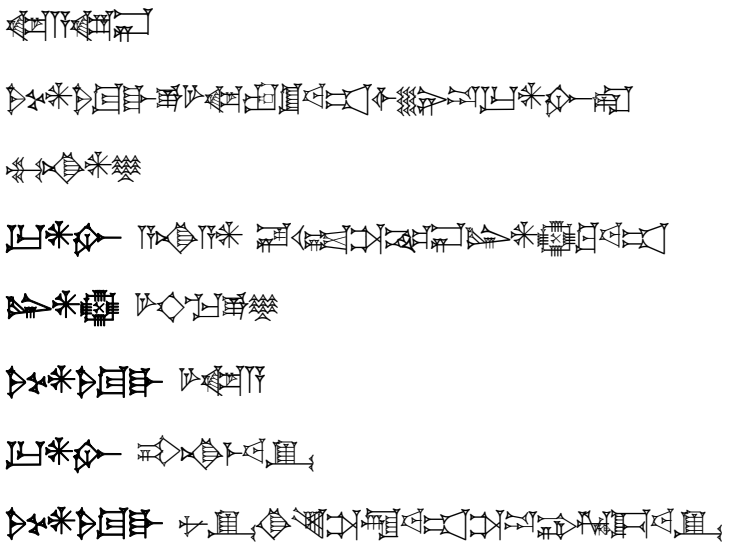
P452255



Lesson 5

DATIVE, IMPERATIVE, PARTICIPLES

5.1 TEXT



Gu_7-a! Naĝ-ĝa!

Geme$_2$-^{d}Nin-gal-e niĝ$_2$-gu$_7$ banšur-še$_3$ ba-ab-ši-in-de$_6$. Ur-Iškur-ra mu-na-an-šum$_2$.

Ur-^{d}Iškur: a-na-am$_3$? sila$_4$ gir$_4$-ta šeĝ$_6$-ĝa? Lu-$^d_2$-Šara, dab$_5$-ba-ab!

Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara: niĝ$_2$-dug$_3$ ma-e-šum$_2$!

Geme$_2$-^{d}Nin-gal: ninda gu$_7$-a!

Ur-^{d}Iškur: ĝeštin na-me ba-ĝal$_2$?

Geme$_2$-^{d}Nin-gal: Nu-ĝal$_2$. šakanka-ta la-ba-ab-ta-de$_6$. kaš sed-da ba-ĝal$_2$.

Ur-^{d}En-ki: kaš mu-naĝ.

Ur-^{d}Iškur: dumu-ra kaš la-ba-na-šum$_2$. Geme$_2$-^{d}Nin-gal, kaš de$_6$-a!

Eat! Drink!

Geme-Ningal brought food to the table. She gave some to Ur-Iškur.

Ur-Iškur: What is it? Oven-roasted lamb? Lu-Šara, take some!

Lu-Šara: You gave a good thing to me!

Geme-Ningal: Have some bread too!

Ur-Iškur: Is there any wine?

Geme-Ningal: No, there isn't. I didn't bring it from the market. Cold beer is available.

Ur-Enki: I drink beer.

Ur-Iškur: To a child, no beer is given. Geme-Ningal, bring the beer!

5.2 GRAMMAR

5.2.1 The Dative

Function

In its primary meaning, the dative names the recepient of something that is given or otherwise handed out. In such sentences, the thing that is given is the direct object, the giver the agent and the receiver the dative object. Thus, in 'the king gave a gift to his son', 'to his son' is the dative object.

In this meaning, the dative typically occurs with verbs like **šum$_2$** 'to give' or **ba** 'to allot'.

In Sumerian, the dative is a strictly personal case, i.e. only a person may ever be a dative object, even if something is given to a temple, the temple cannot become a dative object. However, it is possible that a collective of (real) persons that is (grammatically) of impersonal gender becomes a dative object.

A somewhat more general meaning of the dative is to name the beneficiary of an action, often expressed in phrases like 'to build a house for' or 'to dedicate to'.

With a number of verbs, the dative may also express a direction *towards* some person. e.g. **ĝen** + dat. 'to go towards' or **ku$_4$(r)** + dat. 'to go in to'.

For other verbs, the dative object describes a position before another person, for instance **gub** + dat. 'to stand before' or **ĝal** + dat. 'to be present before'.

Finally, verbs of emotion may mark the person feeling the emotion (or receiving the emotion) as dative, e.g. **sa$_6$** + dat. 'to be pleasing to', **gig** + dat. 'to be painful to' or **ki — aĝ** + dat. 'to love someone'

Dative case marker

Sumerian normally marks a noun as the dative object with the ending **-ra**. This ending suppresses hidden consonants, including the genitive **-k**. When it appears after a vowel (in particular after possessive suffixes), it can also alternatively be written as **-Vr**

lugal-ra (to the king)
išib-ra (to the priest)
dumu-ur (to the sun)
lugal-a-ni-ir (to his king)
lugal zi-ra (to the true king)
dumu lugal-la-ra (to the son of the king)

Resuming the dative

On the verbal side, the dative is resumed via the following elements:

Subject	Singular	Plural
1. Person	ma- (to me)	me- (to us)
2. Person	-ra- (to you)	-e-ne- (to you
3. Person (p)	-na- (to him)	-ne- (to them)
3. Person (i)	ba-	—

Just like the ergative, the dative marker is inseparable from the pronoun. Only 1st person and 3rd person impersonal elements can stand in front of a verbal chain, all others need either a dummy vowel or a conjugation prefix. However, **mu-** as prefix may not occur together with any of the 1st person forms because they share the same origin, ***mu-ma-* isn't used, but **mu-ra-** is entirely possible. For the same reason, **ba-** as conjugation prefix cannot occur together with **ba-** as impersonal dative.

In the verbal chain, the dative *precedes* the dimensional cases (if present) and hence also the ergative (if present).

niĝ$_2$ ma-an-šum$_2$ (he gave a thing to me)
niĝ$_2$ i$_3$-ra-an-šum$_2$ (he gave a thing to you)
ma-gub-be$_2$-en (you stood before me)
i$_3$-na-gig (it was painful to him)
e$_2$-a-ni mu-na-du$_3$ (he built his house for him)

Note that the element **ba-** represents, on face value, somewhat of a contradiction: We've stated above that the dative is a strictly personal case— so why would one want to resume *impersonal* gender?

Part of the answer is that a number of persons usually becomes a grammatically impersonal collective. But the form can also be used to resume the case equivalent to the dative for things, the locative/terminative (see later). Moreover, the form has been generalized to act as a conjugation prefix with no particular dative meaning at all.

5.2.2 The imperative

Imperatives are used to command someone to perform an action expressed by the verb. Thus, per definition they are 2nd person forms and do not need any personal pronoun marker to make that clear.

Conceptually, the Sumerian imperative is a reversal of the order in the verbal chain. Rather than being the rear, the root moves to the front of the chain and the rest of the chain arranges behind the root.

For the time being, let's consider the most simple scenario: If we take a minimal expression like **i$_3$-gub** with a dummy vowel in front of the root, the imperative transformation moves the vowel simply behind the root. Since it is merely a dummy, it can (and does) change to a different vowel, so it becomes **-a** when following the root and we get **gub-ba!** 'stand!' (with the usual 'picking up' of the vowel) as the imperative.

It is possible to indicate an object by appending **-Vn** (personal) or **-Vb** (impersonal) to the imperative form. For the simplest form of the imperative discussed here, these endings become **-an**'him' and **-ab** 'it'.

Note that we're still dealing with an ergative language, so translations can change to causative expressions like 'make him do' or similar to capture the Sumerian idea.

ĝen-na! (go!)
ku$_4$-ra! (enter!)
igi bar-ra (look!)
gu$_7$-a-ab (eat it!)
šum$_2$-ma-ab (give it!)
ĝen-na-an! (make him go!)

5.2.3 The perfect participle

The perfect participle is grammatically an adjective that expresses the idea that the verbal action has been carried out. A text is 'written', i.e. the writing is over and the text is there. A meal is 'eaten', and thus the plate is empty.

Because Sumerian is an ergative language, there is no fundamental difference between active and passive participles, i.e. the same Sumerian expression can be translated 'having eaten' or 'having been eaten' according to context.

Perfect participles are formed with the nominalizing verb ending **-a** — which makes them equal in form to the simple imperatives discussed just above.

sar-ra (written)
ĝen-na (gone)
šum$_2$-ma (given)
du$_3$-a (built)

In a sentence, participles usually take the role of adjectives qualifying a noun inside a noun chain. When translating them, it sometimes makes more sense to use a short relative sentence rather than an English participle.

e$_2$ du$_3$-a (the built house, i.e. the house that has been built)
mu sar-ra (the text that has been written)
sila$_4$ šeĝ-ĝa (lamb that has been roasted)
niĝ$_2$-ba šum$_2$-ma (a gift that has been given)

This is especially true when the participle is qualified by a noun in ergative (or instrumental) case:

e$_2$ lugal-e du$_3$-a (the house that has been built by the king)
sila$_4$ gir$_4$-ta šeĝ-ĝa (lamb that has been roasted in the oven)

However, when the noun qualified by a longer participle construction has a case ending (because it represents the agent or the indirect object in the sentence), that ending is usually

shed. Consider a sentence like **lu$_2$-ra nig̃$_2$-gu$_7$ ba-na-šum$_2$** 'food was given to the man'. If we want to say 'the man to whom food was given' this becomes **lu$_2$ nig̃$_2$-gu$_7$ šum$_2$-ma** rather than ***lu$_2$-ra nig̃$_2$-gu$_7$ šum$_2$-ma* or ***lu$_2$ nig̃$_2$-gu$_7$ šum$_2$-ma-ra*.

It is however possible to 'claim' the participle construction with a possessive ending to produce sentences like

lu$_2$ nig̃$_2$-gu$_7$ šum$_2$-ma-g̃u$_{10}$
('my man [to whom] food was given', i.e. the man to whom I gave food)

As a side note, some Sumerian names make use of participle constructions, the best known example being Mesanepada which resolves as **meš An-e pad$_3$-da** 'young man chosen by An'.

5.2.4 Questions

Questions can conceptually be divided into yes/no questions and open questions (the latter require a sentence as answer). Sumerian has, as far as is known, no way to mark yes/no questions in writing, so presumably in spoken Sumerian intonation distinguished questions from statements (it is possible that word order might have played a role, but the evidence either way is slim).

In the transliteration, we can however easily mark questions with a question mark (and this is done in this course), so unless you read through the cuneiform texts, you will always be able to tell question from statement.

kaš g̃a$_2$-ra ba-g̃al$_2$ (There is beer for me.)
kaš g̃a$_2$-ra ba-g̃al$_2$? (Is there beer for me?)

As Sumerian doesn't have words for 'yes' and 'no', such questions are actually answered by repeating the (negated) verb:

ba-g̃al$_2$ (yes) / nu-g̃al$_2$ (no)

Open questions use question words (often combined with the copula) that are usually found at the beginning of the sentence. They are inflected variants of the basic forms **a-ba** 'who?', **a-na** 'what?' and **me-a** 'where?'.

Common examples include

a-na-aš (it is for what?, i.e. why?)
a-na-am$_3$ (it is what?, i.e. why?)
a-na-gin$_7$ (it is like what, i.e. how?)
me-še$_3$ (to where?)
me-ta (from where?)
en-na-me-še$_3$ (to until, i.e. how long)

The structure of the sentences formed is fairly similar to English:

a-na-am$_3$ lugal iri-ta ba-e$_3$? (Why did the king go out of the city?)
me-ta Ur-^{d}Iškur im-ta-g̃en? (From where did Ur-Iškur get here?)
en-na-me-še$_3$ ba-gub-be$_2$-en? (How long did you stand?)
a-na-gin$_7$-nam sila$_4$ ba-šeg̃? (How was the lamb roasted?)

Each of these require conceptually a complete sentence as answer or explanation.

Ur-^{d}Iškur uri$_5^{ki}$-ta im-g̃en (Ur-Iškur came from Ur)

5.2.5 *The indefinite pronoun*

Formally an adjective, the expression **na-me** can render a noun indefinite — as it typically occurs with nouns like **niĝ$_2$** or **lu$_2$**, it expresses the idea of the English indefinite pronoun.

niĝ$_2$ na-me (something)
lu$_2$ na-me (someone)
ki na-me (somewhere)
u$_4$ na-me (sometime)

When the verb is negated, it has to be translated accordingly as 'not any' etc.

še na-me ba-ĝal$_2$ (there is some grain)
še na-me nu-ĝal$_2$ (there is not any grain)
silim-ma ki na-me nu-gal$_2$? (Is there nowhere in peace?)

5.3 VOCABULARY

Sumerian	English
an-ub-da	corner
ba	to allot
banšur	table
bara$_2$	dais, altar
dab$_5$	to take, accept, seize
gir$_4$	oven
gu$_7$	to eat
ĝal$_2$	to be, exist
ĝeštin	wine
kaš	beer
^{gis}kiri$_6$	garden, orchard
ma-da	land
naĝ	to drink
niĝ$_2$-gu$_7$	food
niĝ$_2$-dug$_3$	a good thing
ku$_4$(r)	to enter
saĝ-uš$_2$	supporter, patron
sikil	pure
sila$_4$	lamb
še	grain
šakanka	market
šeĝ	to roast, cook
u$_2$-a	nourisher

5.4 CONVERSATION — MEETING ROYALTY

Sumerian Ur at its prime had a population of about 65.000 people (just about the size of a modern small to medium-sized town) — thus for a citizen meeting the city ruler wasn't really unlikely or far-fetched.

When visiting the royal court — what should you expect to hear, what are you expected to say?

First of all, Sumerian rulers absolutely love thir titles, so you should know a few relevant ones. Let's work our way up from the more modest titles: Gudea usually was known as

ensi$_2$ lagaš^{ki} (ruler of Lagash)

It would seem that **ensi**$_2$ denotes the highest office in a city, but as rulers acquired domains spanning more than one city, an **ensi**$_2$ might have had the role of a governor for the real ruler (who had his seat elsewhere).

Many rulers were known as

lugal uri^{ki}-ma (king of Ur)

and

lugal ki-en-gi ki-uri (king of Sumer and Akkad)

hinting that while their power base was Ur, their domain was larger. In fact, the title

lugal an-ub-da-limmu$_2$-ba (king of the four corners [of the world])

conveys just that idea — the king rules over basically everything that's worth ruling.

Other titles tie the king directly to a divine mandate:

nibru^{ki}-a en-lil$_2$-le mu-pad$_3$-da (chosen by Enlil in Nippur)

claims the king as the rightful ruler selected by the supreme deity in the most holy place. Of course, the divine mandate doesn't come for free — in turn the king is supposed to provide his support to the temples, giving rise to further titles like

saĝ-uš$_2$ e$_2$ ^{d}en-lil$_2$-la$_2$-ka (supporter of the temple of Enlil)
u$_2$-a e$_2$ an-na (nourisher of Eanna)

A host of agricultural metaphors elaborate this supporting and nourishing role:

engar zi uri^{ki}-ma (the true plowman of Ur)
sipa zi kalam-ma (true shepherd of the land)

(note that **kalam** always denotes the Sumerian domain whereas **ma-da** is a general term for land).

Ocasionally, a king overdid things a bit...

...dumu tu-da ^{d}nisaba ga-zi ku$_2$-a ^{d}nin-ḫur-saĝ...
(...son born by Nisaba, with holy milk fed by Ninḫursaĝ...)

Thus, when entering the throne room, you may state the appropriate choice of titles to address the king and at the end introduce yourself by name and state your function like

sukkal mir-ta-me-en (I am an envoy from the north)
arad-zu-me-en (I am your servant)

When the introduction is done, you might be called forward with

^{gis}gu-za-še$_3$ teĝ-ĝa! (Approach the throne!)
lugal-ra gub-ba (Stand before the king!)

If the audience went well, the king may proclaim something like

lu$_2$-bi ku-li-ĝu$_{10}$ ḫe$_2$-am$_3$! (This man shall be my friend!)
mu-ĝu$_{10}$ ḫe$_2$-pad$_3$-de$_3$! (My name he shall invoke!)

If you hear such a statement, royal protection has been extended unto you and you may drop the king's name in further dealings with the administration of the city state.

5.5 PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Translate the following expressions into English: a) niĝ$_2$-ba šum$_2$-ma b) še i$_3$-ra-šum$_2$ c) dumu sağ lugal-la-ra gub-ba d) dab$_5$-a-ab e) igi bar-ra-an f) geštin sed-da na-me ba-ğal? g) munus kaš šum$_2$-ma-ğu h) gir$_4$-ta dab$_5$-ba-ab ka-še$_3$ ğar-ra-ab

Exercise 2: Translate the following expressions into Sumerian: a) wash! b) go to the great plain! c) give grain to the scribe! d) bring beer from the market! e) a written name f) a seized lamb g) you have given it to me

Exercise 3: Translate the following imperatives into Sumerian: a) make him cook! b) drink it! c) make him build! d) look! e) raise your hands!

5.6 READING CUNEIFORM

5.6.1 Names

Names of places and persons are particularly troublesome to read, chiefly because so many complications can occur — names often represent fairly old strata of the language and tend to obey rules that are no longer present in everyday communication.

For personal names, often the presence of AN as the determinative for a divine name is a tell-tale. As we've seen earlier, a fairly common pattern to form Sumerian names is '[person] of [god]' — we see this in Ur-Nammu, Ur-Iškur or Geme-Bau. In these names, the god-part of the name carries the determinative.

For royal names, there is a possibility that the king is perceived as deified — in which case his whole name is marked with AN. It can thus be that a royal name is marked twice — first because the royal name is seen as deified, and then because it contains a name part which is the name of a god (which of course also is deified).

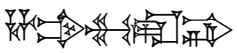
Unfortunately, AN is a fairly common sign which is used in syllabic as well as logogram and compound signs — so while it *might* signify the presence of a name around it, this is not a certainty.

The situation is similar with KI and place names — places are usually determined with KI, but not every KI indicates that there is a place named ahead of it. ID$_2$ however fairly consistently indicates that there's likely a river name following.

We have already seen a couple of Sumerian names in the texts (more are in appendix G), so let's focus in the following on deviations from that pattern.

Syllabic names

Easiest to deal with are syllabic names. Usually names that are not Sumerian in origin are written syllabically. This is especially the case in Old Babylonian texts where the spoken language was Akkadian and Sumerian served as a kind of formal language mastered only by scholars. Examples for such names are 'Hammurabi' or 'Tirigan'

 Hammurabi  Tirigan

The division into syllables isn't necessarily how we would do it intuitively (probably we'd write***ha-mu-ra-bi* rather than **ha-am-mu-ra-bi**) and **ti-ri$_2$-ga-a-an** uses **ri$_2$** rather than **ri**, but such level of complication is easy to deal with.

Unusual readings

Compare the (hopefully quite familiar) name Ur-Iškur with the writing of Nur-Adad:

 Ur-Iškur  Nur-Adad

The same sign is read in one case **Iškur** and in the other **Adad**. It's impossible to correctly parse this without a good deal of cultural context — **Iškur** is the Sumerian god of rain and storm and **Adad** is his Akkadian equivalent, so they are written by the same cuneiform sign. Only by knowing that Nur-Adad fits into an Akkadian linguistic context can we understand how the sign needs to be pronounced, it is not evident from the writing at all.

Sign reversals

In some cases, the order in which signs are to be read is different from the writing order. Consider the name Amar-Sin:

 Amar-Sin

This is a doubly-deified name, ^{d}**amar-**^{d}**en-su**, in which the first AN-determinative deifies the whole royal name and the second is the standard writing of the divine name Sin — however Sin isn't written ^{**d}*su-en* but in reverse order ^{d}**en-su**.

Again, there is no possible way to recognize this from looking at the cuneiform writing — you just have to know,

Unusual spellings

A name may draw an unusual sign when picking up a consonant. The most prominent example of this is Enlil. The genitive of it is consistently written as

 en-lil$_2$-la$_2$

i.e. using **la**$_2$ rather than the far more common **la**.

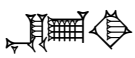
There are theories as to why this is so (for instance the idea that Sumerian has two different l-sounds which need to be distinguished in writing), but it may be just as well a historical quirk.

Either way, the unusual syllabic spelling has to be learned as part of the name.

Place names

Place names have their own level of complications because they tend to tie strongly to the historic significance of a place as well as characteristic features.

Consider the following examples:

 Babylon  Nippur

Babylon is a descriptive name **ka-diĝir-ra**^{ki} 'gate of the god'. Nippur also is descriptive in writing **en-lil**$_2^{ki}$ 'city associated with Enlil' — but this is now how the name is read, it must be read **nibru**. We know this because of the pattern endings attach to the name, it is **nibru**^{ki}**-a** 'in Nippur' with no consonant picked up.

5.6.2 Sign list

Logograms and compound sign readings:

	IG	ĝal$_2$		KA×GAR	gu$_7$
	SUM	šum$_2$		KA×A	naĝ
	GEŠTIN	geštin		URU×URUDA	banšur
	NE	šeg$_6$		U.AD	gir$_4$
	KU	dab$_5$		GA$_2$×PA	sila$_4$
	HI	dug$_3$		MUŠ$_3$×(A.DI)	sed
	GAR	ninda		KI.LAM	šakanka
	BI	kaš		BARA$_2$	bara$_2$
	SAR	kiri$_6$		EL	sikil

Syllabic readings (note that as we have introduced a lot of the commonly used syllabic signs already, the number of new signs gets less):

	RA	ra		IR	ir
	LAL	la$_2$		KID	lil$_2$
	RI	re, ri			

5.6.3 Exercise

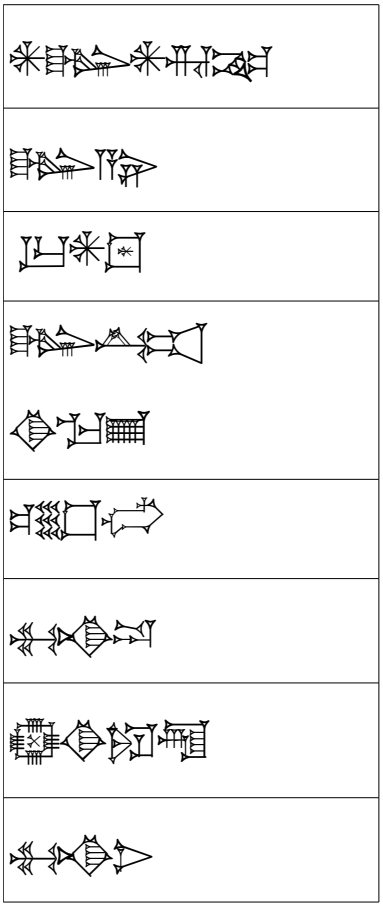
Also this reading exercise is a reproduction of an original clay brick - if you insert the number into the CDLI search engine

`https://cdli.earth/search`

you can see a photograph of the artifact. Several phrases should be familiar by now.

Unfortunately, Sumerian kings didn't arrange their royal inscription in a pedagogical order matching this course, so this reading exercise contains a bit of grammar that was not yet discussed — the phrase **diĝir-re-ne** is a plural meaning 'gods'.

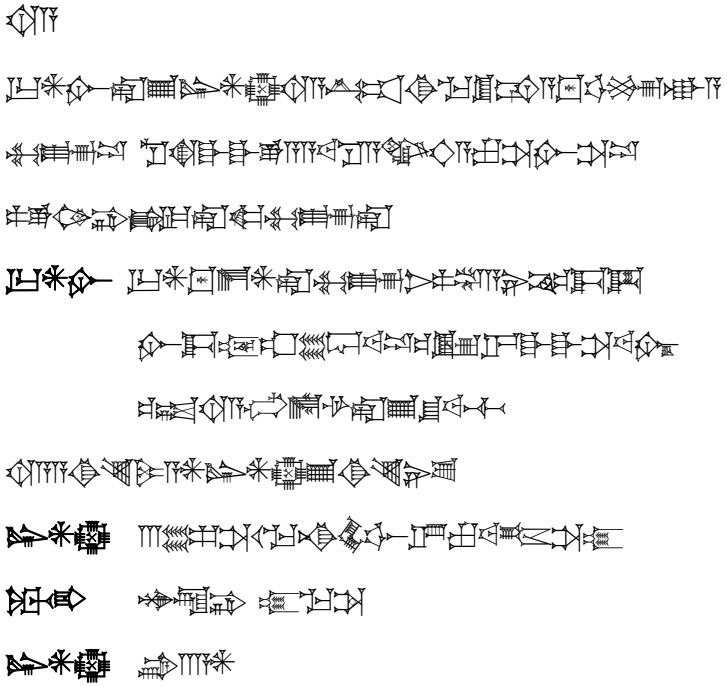
P227104



Lesson 6

LOCATIVE-TERMINATIVE, PLURAL, NUMERALS

6.1 TEXT



Kar

Ur-^{d}Iškur-ke Lu-$^{d}_{2}$-Šara kar uri$^{ki}_{5}$-ma-še$_3$ gu$_2$ ^{id}buranun-ak-a mu-un-tum$_2$. ma$_2$-gur$_8$ gal-gal a-a ba-diri. Anše-hi-a iri-ta im-ta-g̃en. ugula-e lipiš-be$_2$ il$_2$-ra gu$_3$ mu-un-ra$_2$.

Ur-^{d}Iškur: Ur-^{d}Nammu-ke e$_2$ diĝir-ra mu-un-du$_3$. maškim-a-ni-ne-da a$_2$ im-da-ag̃$_2$. uruda še-gin$_7$ ba-de$_6$. ^{gis}eren tun$_3$ gal-gal-ta ba-kid$_7$, ^{gis}ad gal-gal kar ma$_2$ ka$_2$-sur-ra-ke$_4$ šu ba-ti.

kar-a šakanka tur-am$_3$. Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara-ke malba i$_3$-zu.

Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara: eš$_5$ še-gur-ta, u ma-na uruda-ta ku$_3$-babbar diš gig̃$_4$ iri-ba ib$_2$-ta-šam$_2$!

dam-gar$_3$: ul$_4$-la-bi šam$_2$-ma lal$_3$!

Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara: dug min-am$_3$!

The harbour

Ur-Iškur has brought Lu-Šara to the harbour of Ur at the bank of the Euphrates. Great bargues floated on the water. Various donkeys came from the city. A foreman shouted angrily at porters.

Ur-Iškur: Ur-Nammu built the house of the god. He sent command to his administrators. Copper was brought in like grain. Cedars were felled with great axes, great rafts were received at the border gate.

At the harbour was a small market. Lu-Šara studied the prices.

Lu-Šara: Three gur of grain or ten minas of copper does one shekel silver in this city buy!

Merchant: Quickly buy some honey!

Lu-Šara: Two jars!

6.2 GRAMMAR

6.2.1 Locative and locative-terminative

Overview

There is a close relationship between the ergative, the locative-terminative and the locative. The ergative and locative-terminative share the same ending **-e** but are resumed differently in the verbal chain while the locative differs in the ending **-a** but is resumed in the verbal chain identical to the locative-terminative.

Presumably both ergative and locative-terminative started out originally as the same case, marking an object for closeness, relevance or attention and split into two different functions before Sumerian became a written language. Be this as it may, the three cases cannot be considered completely independent.

Function

The locative primarily marks a position 'in' something, but may be freely rendered as 'on', 'into' or 'among' as the context requires. In a temporal sense, it marks a point in time.

e$_2$-a (in the temple, into the temple)
kalam-ma (in the land)
diĝir-re-ne-a (among the gods)
u$_4$-ba (on that day)

In addition, the locative can also denote the material from which something is made

dug uruda-a (a pot made of copper)

The locative-terminative, as the name suggests, has a functions both indicating a position as well as an end point of an evolution. Locally it refers to an object 'at', 'by, 'next to', 'on', 'upon', 'onto'. 'over' which something is taking place or has ended up. A good tentative way to translate it is to start out with a 'with respect to' and refine according to context.

lugal-e (next to the king)
bad_3-e (onto the wall)
banšur-e ba-g̃ar (it was placed on the table)

For impersonal objects, it can cover the function of the dative indicating a receiver of something.

ba e_2-e e-šum (you gave a gift to the temple)

The fact that the dative in this function occurs only with persons and the locative-terminative with things makes it easy to distinguish between what noun is marked as an agent and what is marked as object.

banšur-e ba-g̃ar (it was placed on the table)
lugal-ra ba-g̃ar (it was placed next to the king)
lugal-e ba-g̃ar (the king placed it)

An important function of the locative-terminative is to mark the object for compound verbs. Consider for instance **gu**$_3$ **— de**$_2$ 'to speak' — literally this means 'to pour out the voice'. Thus, the verb **de**$_2$ 'to pour' already has a direct object, the voice, and since there cannot be a second direct object in a Sumerian sentence, if we want to say 'he spoke a word', we need to mark 'word' with a different case — and this typically is the locative-terminative:

inim-e gu_3 mu-e-de_2 (you said the word)

Again, the context makes it fairly clear that **inim** cannot be marked for ergative as a word isn't a possible actor that could have done something.

Form

The locative-terminative is identical in form with the ergative, there is no way to distinguish the cases by looking at the morphology of a noun.

While the locative looks superficially similar to the genitive (an **-a** is appended instead of **-a(k)**), the important differences are that the locative doesn't create a hidden **-k** and that the **-a** is a stable vowel — it is never merged into a different final vowel and invisible, even where a genitive ending would be invisible.

Of course, the locative ending can (like other case endings as well) render a genitive **-k-** or any other hidden consonant visible:

nin g̃ir$_2$-su^{ki} (the lady of Girsu, genitive)
g̃ir$_2$-su^{ki}-a (in Girsu, locative)
e_2 g̃ir$_2$-su^{ki}-ka (in the temple of Girsu)

In writing, picking up of final consonants may or may not occur:

kaskal-la (on the road)
kaskal-a (on the road)

Resuming locative and locative-terminative

On the verbal side, the cases are resumed via the following elements:

Subject	Singular	Plural
1. Person	mu- (next to me)	—
2. Person	-ri- (next to you)	—
3. Person (p)	-ni- (next to him)	-ne- (next to them)
3. Person (i)	bi_2- (next to it)	—

These forms come immediately before any resumed ergative pronouns, but are preceded by dative or dimensional case elements.

Of the forms, **mu-** and **bi_2-** can stand at the beginning of the verbal chain, the other elements need to be prefixed by some element or a dummy vowel **i_3**.

i_3-ri-in-ĝar (he placed it next to you)

Especially **bi_2-** is a fairly common element to begin a verbal chain as it provides a location nuance:

ba-gub (he stood)
bi_2-gub (he stood there)
bi_2-in-ĝar (he placed it there)

When it is negated, the prefix **nu-** changes to **li-**:

li-bi_2-gub (he did not stand there)

A 2nd person ergative **-e** is absorbed by all forms except **mu-**:

mu-e-ĝar (you placed it next to me)
i_3-ni-ĝar (you placed it next to him)
bi_2-ĝar (you placed it next to them)

A common occurrance is that the ventive element **im-** is prefixed to a local nuance **-bi_2**. This is typically assimilated to **im-mi-** — but quite often can be written with just a single **-m-** as **i_3-mi-** — which is then regarded as having a dummy vowel that can be omitted. Seeing any **-mi-** in the verbal chain is a good telltale that this has happened:

im-mi-in-sar (he wrote it there)
nu-mi-in-sar (he did not write it there)
nu-mi-ib-ĝar (they did not place it there)

6.2.2 Objects and ergativity

We have now everything in place to discuss a few issues that can be problematic due to the different concepts in English and Sumerian grammar.

As we've seen before, in an English sentence we typically have the subject (who performs the action of the verb), the direct object (that is directly affected by the action of the verb) and the indirect object (that is more loosely affected). In the sentence 'The foreman alloted a worker to you' 'the foreman' is the subject, 'a worker' the direct object and 'you' the indirect object (English renders indirect objects using a preposition 'to, for' — other languages treat direct and indirect objects both with case endings).

Sumerian requires a direct object, so the most simple sentence that can be formed is

i_3-ba (it was allotted)

where an 'it' can be added as being implied. If an open object pronoun is used, we get e.g.

i$_3$-ba-an (I was allotted)

and if an indirect object pronoun is added, we might get

i$_3$-ra-ba-an (I was allotted to you)

All these sentences come out as passive in English because no agent is indicated so far — that only changes when an ergative pronoun is added or when we have an open agent in the sentence:

i$_3$-ra–an-ba-an (I was allotted to you by him, i.e. he allotted me to you)
ugula-e i$_3$-ra-ba-an (the foreman allotted me to you)

Where this potentially gets confusing is when Sumerian and English differ in what the direct object is. Consider for instance **ki — ag̃$_2$** 'to love'. In English 'to love someone' requires a direct object. That is not so in Sumerian where **ki** grammatically is the direct object already (the expression literally probably means 'to give out love') — so the beloved one in Sumerian is a receiver and hence an indirect object in dative.

ki ma-an-ag̃$_2$ (he has given out love to me, i.e. he loves me)

In fact, in *every* Sumerian compound verb the direct object is already used, so whenever the translation requires a direct object, it must be in some other case (this is technically called the *oblique object*). If the oblique object is a person, it is likely in dative, if it is a thing it typically is marked using the locative-terminative, but **igi — bar** for instance uses the terminative. Even when we translate 'to see something' (which is a direct object in English), we should not be fooled and render the oblique object correctly.

e$_2$-še$_3$ igi im-ši-bar (I look towards the temple, i.e. I see the temple)

Yet other verbs take other cases — verbs of emotion like **ḫul**$_2$ 'to rejoice' take the comitative to indicate what the emotion is about.

e-da-ḫul-le-en (I am happy because of you)

6.2.3 Plural

General considerations

It's probably fair to state that Sumerian does not emphasize the grammatical concept of plural — in fact, the language seems to avoid it almost whenever possible, and this appears to be especially true in the older stages of the languages — later plurals found at the stages when Sumerian was no longer a living language might well be coined after Akkadian grammar by scribes who felt that something was missing.

How, then, can plurals be avoided at all?

We've stated earlier in 2.2.4 that groups of people or things like **ug̃**$_3$ 'people' are regarded as singular nouns of impersonal gender. Especially in old texts, a similar thing can happen — a single individual stands for the whole group in a *pars pro toto* construction, for instance when a foreman commands his workers, the workers can just be represented by a grammatical singular. When a king commands the construction of a temple, the Sumerian texts talk about the king making bricks and laying the foundation — this isn't likely to mean he did the work all by himself, it just represents a way to fall back to a singular.

So anonymous groups of things and people usually end up being impersonal singulars. What about named groups?

When linked with 'and', we've seen in 3.2.7 that original Sumerian uses **-bi-da** which literally means rather 'together with, at the side of' — and that isn't even plural in English. Thus, even a named list of individuals or of distinct things may not be plural.

In European languages, we're used to number agreement between verb and noun — 'Andrew goe**s** to the movies' but 'Julia and Andrew go to the movies' — the verb form tends to change (this can be much more pronounced in languages other than English). In the context of Sumerian, number agreement is essentially a statement about resuming the agent. Thus, we might expect

diĝir-e mu-un-gub (the god established it) vs.
diĝir diĝir-e mu-un-gub-eš (all the gods established it)

But remember that resuming is essentially optional if the information has been conveyed before, so

diĝir diĝir mu-gub (all the gods established it)

without any open plural marker on the verb is just as viable.

Sumerian verbs marked for any plural are rare, instances in the living language occur only in 3rd person, 1st and 2nd person markings are exceedingly rare and might well be later inventions by Babylonian scribes. While this course lists the known forms, they are not used in texts or examples.

The personal plural ending

For gropus of persons (not things), the plural can be formed with the ending **-(e)ne**. When a noun ends in a consonant, the **-e-** is written (possibly including a picked up consonant), when the noun ends in a vowel, just **-ne** can be appended. Should the word end in an **-i**, this might be assimilated to **-e** (the common cases **bi** $>$ **be**$_2$ and **li** $>$ **le**$_2$ actually use the same cuneiform sign, so it's impossible to tell from writing).

dumu-ne (sons)
dub-sar-e-ne (scribes)
diĝir-re-ne (gods)

In the noun chain, the plural ending has a slot between demonstrative/possessive pronoun and genitive.

dub-sar tur-be$_2$-ne (these young scribes)
e$_2$ diĝir-re-ne (the house of gods)
e$_2$ diĝir-re-ne-ka (at the house of gods)
šeš gal-ĝu$_{10}$-ne (my great brothers)

The ending -hi-a

As a past participle originally meaning 'mixed', the ending **-hi-a** has the connotation of 'an assortment of' or 'various different', thus it is used if not all of the objects referred to are the same. In the noun chain, the ending takes the spot of the adjective.

lu$_2$-hi-a (various different people)
dug-hi-a (a collection of jars)
anše-hi-a-bi (these assorted donkeys)

Plural stems

A few verbs change the stem dependent on whether their direct object is in singular or plural. Consider for instance **til**$_3$ 'to live':

lu$_2$ iri-a ba-til$_3$ (a man lived in the city)
lu$_2$-ne iri-a ba-sig$_7$ (men lived in the city)

Likewise **gub** 'to stand' shows this pattern:

gu$_3$ id$_2$-a dam-gar$_3$ ba-gub (a merchant stood at the river bank)
gu$_3$ id$_2$-a dam-gar$_3$-re-ne ba-su$_8$ (merchants stood at the river bank)

A list of irregular verbs can be found in appendix C.

6.2.4 Numerals

The Sumerian numerals from 1–10 are pronounced as follows:

1	diš, aš	6	aš$_3$
2	min	7	inim
3	eš$_5$	8	ussu
4	limmu$_2$	9	ilimmu
5	ia	10	u

We know how numbers in Sumerian are *written*, but the pronounciation is known only for a few others — so when transliterating, usually the number is just written as number.

They can be used simply in front of something to be counted:

min u$_4$ (two days)
limmu$_2$ dub-sar (four scribes)

Often they are combined with the copula:

dub-sar limmu$_2$-am$_3$ e$_2$-gal-še$_3$ mu-un-g̃en-eš (four scribes went to the palace)

Literally the sentence would render 'scribes, them being four, went to the palace'.

Ordinal numbers are formed with a genitive and the copula, often followed by another genitive:

min-kam-ma (the second one)
u$_4$ limmu$_2$-kam-ma-ka (on the fourth day)

When counting measures, Sumerian is quite flexible — either 'item, measure, numeral' or 'numeral, measure, item' works:

aš gi g̃$_4$ ku$_3$-babbar (one shekel silver)
lal$_3$ dug ussu (eight pots of honey)

6.2.5 Adverbs

Adverbs can be formed in Sumerian in a number of ways. The most obvious one is the combination of the endings **-bi-še**$_3$ appended to the adjective or verbal stem (remember a similar ending **-bi-da** meaning 'and' discussed in 3.2.7 — it would be wrong to limit the function of what we call Sumerian case endings to nouns):

gal-bi-še$_3$ (greatly)
teš-bi-še$_3$ (together)

Just as in the case of 'and' where the ending **-bi-da** could be shortened to **-bi**, the same is also possible for adverbs. This means that an ending **-bi** has quite a lot of potential interpretations unfortunately (it is possible that the adverb ending is really read **-be**$_2$ — but it would still be written with the same cuneiform sign).

ḫul-la-bi (happily)
lipiš-be$_2$ (angrily)
ul$_4$-la-bi (quickly)

6.3 VOCABULARY

Sumerian	English
a$_2$ — ag̃$_2$	to command
^{gis}ad	log, raft
anše	donkey
dam-gar$_3$	merchant
diri	to float
dug	pot, jar
e$_2$-gal	palace
^{gis}eren	cedar
gi-na	certified
gu$_2$	neck, riverbank
gu$_3$ — raḫ$_3$	to shout
il$_2$	porter
ka$_2$	gate
kar	quay, harbour
kid$_7$	to cut, fell
ku$_3$-babbar	silver
lal$_3$	honey
lipiš	anger
ma$_2$-gur$_8$	barge
malba	price
maškim	administrator
sur-ra	boundary
šam$_2$	to buy
šu — ti	to receive
teš	unity
til	to live
tum$_2$	to bring, lead to
tun$_3$	axe
ul$_4$	to hurry
ugula	foreman
uruda	copper
zu	to know, learn

6.4 CONVERSATION — LET'S GO SHOPPING!

On a Sumerian market, quite often silver seems to have been the payment of choice — but to make sense of prices, we first need to look at how the Sumerians measured units.

The base unit of capacity is the **sila**$_3$ 'bowl' which is about 1 liter. From that, the following units are derived:

unit	ratio	modern
$gi\tilde{g}_4$	1/60	1.7 cl
$sila_3$	1	1 l
ban_2	10	10 l
ba-ri_2-ga	60	60 l
gur	300	300 l

The basis of weight on the other hand is the shekel **gi$\tilde{\mathbf{g}}_4$** which corresponds to about 8.4 g. The following multiple units exist:

unit	ratio	modern
še	1/180	46.6 mg
$gi\tilde{g}_4$	1	8.4 g
ma-na	60	504 g
gun_2	3,600	30.2 kg

In today's prices, a shekel silver would be about 15 US$ — so what does that buy? Sin-Gašid for instance thought it worthwhile to record prices during his reign — a shekel silver would buy three gur (1000 l) of barley, 10 minas (5 kg) of copper and 12 minas (6 kg) of wool — today one could buy 5 kg copper for about 65 US$ whereas 6 kg raw wool might be about 24 US$. On the other hand, 1000 l barley could be obtained for as little as about 2 US$.

Clearly, silver and barley were worth a lot more in Sumerian times...

Once you are ready to purchase something, you have to take note that Sumerian doesn't need to express 'I want' using a verb. The reason we'll see in the next lesson — wishes and needs can expressed by grammar, not by vocabulary.

So the most common phrase needed is

lal_3 ga-ab-$šam_2$ (I want to buy honey)

The phrase is indeed so widespread that **gab-sa$_{10}$** means 'buyer' and **gab-šum$_2$** seller — coined for what they say during a sale.

Otherwise, **al— du$_{11}$** 'to desire' can be used to state what you want.

tug_2 su-bi al mu-du_{11} (I want this brown garment)

Prices for a unit are quoted using **-ta** in a meaning as 'per':

min $sila_3$ še-ta malba diš $gi\tilde{g}_4$ ku-babbar-am_3
(the price of two sila barley is one shekel silver)

The final bill can be presented with a phrase like

$eš_5$ ma-na ku_3-babbar e-la_2-e (you shall pay 2 mina silver)

Economic vocabulary: malba (price), dam-gar_3 (merchant), šakanka (market), ur_5-ra (loan), $šam_2$ (to buy), šu — ti (to receive)

Various goods: i_3 (oil), lal_3 (honey), siki (wool), še (barley, grain), kaš (beer), ninda (bread), ĝeštin (wine), tug_2 (garment), gu (cord), kuš (leather), mun (salt), ga (milk), uruda (copper), zabar (bronze), an-na (lead), ^{gis}eren (cedar wood)

Lifestock: anše (donkey), udu (sheep), gud (ox), $maš_2$ (goat), $sila_4$ (lamb), ab_2 (cow)

Colors: su (red, brown), giggi (black), babbar (white), si_{12}-si_{12} (yellow), za-gin_3 (blue)

6.5 PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Translate the following expressions into English: a) išib iri-a bi_2-ku_4 b) kisal-a gub-ba-an c) šakanka-e dug lal_3-la ba-de_6 d) i_3-ri-ĝar e) mu-e-gub f) e_2 diĝir-ra bi_2-in-du_3 g) nin-be_2-ne

Exercise 2: Translate the following expressions into Sumerian: a) I went into the house b) the foreman looked angrily at the porter c) An, king of the gods d) those great kings e) he has put it there f) you wrote it there

Exercise 3: Form the plural: a) dub-sar b) dumu tur c) maškim d) kur e) il_2 f) f) ugula g) bad_3 gal

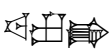
6.6 READING CUNEIFORM

6.6.1 Units in cuneiform

Most units introduced in the conversation section have their own logogram, only few are written syllabically.

Capacity:

 $giĝ_4$  $sila_3$ ban_2

 ba-ri_2-ga gur

Weight:

 še  $giĝ_4$  ma-na

 gun_2

6.6.2 Numerals

Introduction

Writing numbers in Sumerian is not staightforward, because how a number is written depends on a) what is counted? and b) what unit is currently being used (if this seems strange, think of 19th century English currency).

For the most part, the system of writing Sumerian numbers is additive. This is different from our arabic numbers which are a place value system. To see the difference, consider 511 vs. the Roman VII (the latter is *almost* additive) — 511 doesn't read 'seven' on the grounds that we add twice the sign for 'one' to the sign for 'five' — but that is exactly like the Roman number works. Instead, based on its place in the sequence, we read the symbol '5' as having a value of five-hundred.

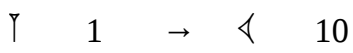
Whenever Sumerians count some real quantity — be it weight, length, surface area, duration or volume — they use an additive system. Only when they do arithmetics and calculate, they refer to a place number system.

Unfortunately, even knowing the system is additive, how a number is written depends on what unit is currently used for what measure. Let's consider this in detail.

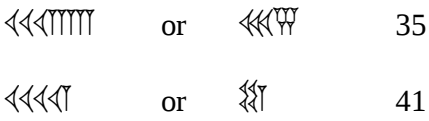
The Common System

Suppose we want to write down the weight of copper. We have the **gi$\tilde{g}$**$_4$ (shekel) as the basic unit and we never need to count to more than 59 shekels because 60 already make a mina. The same is true when weight increases — after 59 mina, we move to a **gun**$_2$.

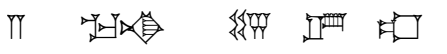
To write this all down, just two signs for 1 and 10 suffice:



Because the system is additive, to write 20 we repeat the sign for '10' twice, to write seven we repeat the sign for '1' seven times (because that tends to look ugly, more compact cuneiform have evolved).



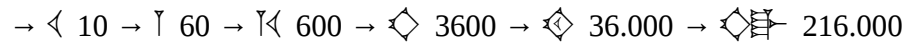
Thus, 2 mina and 45 shekel copper reads in Sumerian



2	ma-na	45	gi$\hat{g}$$_4$	uruda

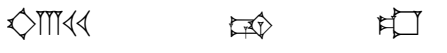
Counting larger numbers

Suppose we have a lot of copper — so much that we measure the total in **gan**$_2$ (talents). There is no unit corresponding to 60 talents, so now we need to be able to write larger numbers. This is still done additively, but a few more signs are necessary:



aš	u	geš$_2$	geš'u	šar$_2$	šar'u	šar$_2$-gal

If we want to write 3800 talents of copper (about 114 tons), this reads



3600+180+20	gun$_2$	uruda

This is called the 'System S'.

Note here that — vexingly enough — the 'one' is written different from the common system — the **diš** has been replaced by **aš** an the vertical stroke now means 60.

Counting years

Counting years works *almost* like the System S — except that **diš** is introduced back as '1'. This of course prompts the obvious question how to distinguish it from **geš**$_2$ (that stands for 60)? If any amount of **u** is part of the number, this isn't a problem — whatever is left of **u** has to be read **geš**$_2$ and whatever is right must then be **diš** (and counted as 1).

But what if there isn't?

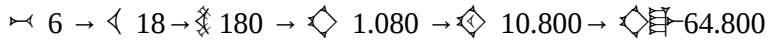
In this case, the sequence **šu-ši** may be inserted into the number as a separator.

 306 (years)  3.195 (years)

Incidentially, pretty much the same system is used to write down the count of line numbers and sections in a document.

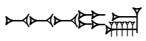
Counting large area

Areas of fields and property above about 1.800 m^2 (an **ubu**) generally receive the unit **gan**$_2$ and have their own counting system that differs from the System S. This is to say, part of the cuneiform signs are the same as in System S,but their numerical value (and their reading) is different:



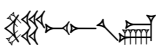
ubu iku eše$_3$ bur$_3$ bur'u šar$_2$ šar'u šar$_2$-gal

This is the system G. Just like System S, it is additive, but the values are different. Putting an area of about 8 ha (79.200 m^2 to be precise) in cuneiform works like



3 eše 4 iku gan$_2$

and a square kilometer comes out as



1 bur'u 5 bur$_3$ 1 eše$_3$ 1 iku 1 ubu gan$_2$

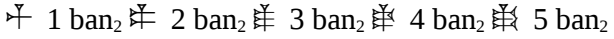
Conceptually thus, a sign like **šar**$_2$ *in isolation* doesn't mean a number of the System G, but in combination with **gan**$_2$ acting as a marker for area it does.

(Smaller areas have units that can be counted with the common system).

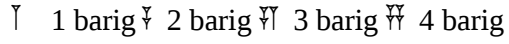
Peculiarities in counting capacity

If you've been studying carefully so far, you might have noticed that six **ban**$_2$ make a **barig** and five of those a **gur** — so this *looks like* it could be counted using the common system.

Except it isn't — for these units, and only these units, the sign for the numeral is merged into the sign for the unit.



1 ban$_2$ 2 ban$_2$ 3 ban$_2$ 4 ban$_2$ 5 ban$_2$



1 barig 2 barig 3 barig 4 barig

Here is an example for a quantity of oil:

2-barig 4-ban$_2$ 9 sila$_3$ i$_3$

It doesn't seem like **ba-ri**$_2$**-ga** is usually spelled out when writing actual liquid measures, people just know from what is measured what the appropriate measure is.

6.6.3 Sign list

Logograms and compound sign readings ((XXX) here means that the name of the sign is rather. . . complex):

	MA_2	ma_2		(XXX)	buranun
	DU	tum_2		TE.A	kar
	TE@g	gur_8		SI.A	diri
	ANŠE	anše		AB_2×$ŠA_3$	lipiš
	PA	ugula		GIR_2@g	ul_4
	A_2	a_2		$NINDA_2$×NE	$aĝ_2$
	URUDA	uruda		IM×TAK_4	kid_7
	EREN	eren		DUN_3	tun_3
	ŠE	še		AD	ad
	KA_2	ka_2		SUR	sur
	TI	ti		KI.LAM	šakanka
	ZU	zu		KI.LAM	malba
	KU_3	ku_3		$NINDA_2$×ŠE	šam
	RA	rah_2		LAL_3	lal_3
	DUG	dug		PA.DU@s	maškim

Syllabic readings:

	AK	ak		HI	hi
	AD	ad		TUM	ib_2

6.6.4 Exercise

The reading exercise text of this lesson is not exactly a votive inscription, although it is fairly similar in style. It is the official certification statement on a stone of standardized weight.

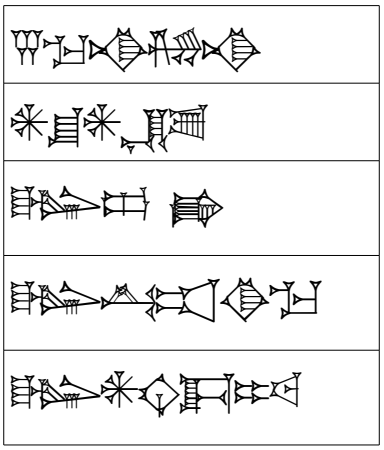
If you enter the number into the CDLI engine

`https://cdli.earth/search`

you can see a photograph of the artifact.

The text contains two numerals as well as a number of stock phrases you should have seen in earlier lessons.

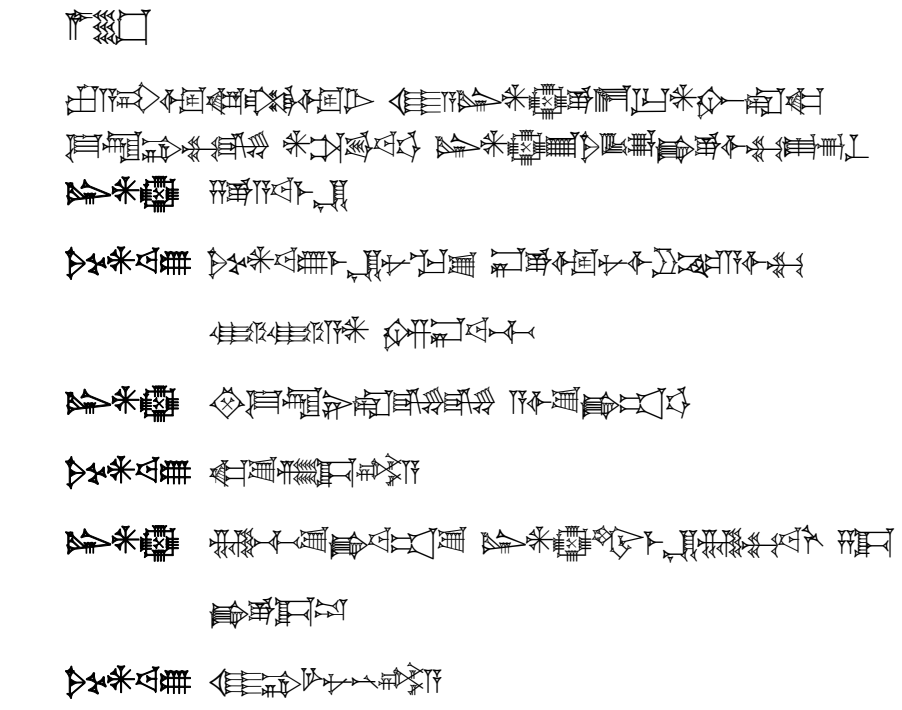
P226934



Lesson 7

MARU, WISHES

7.1 TEXT



Usar

iri-a ĝeštin u_3-naĝ balaĝ u_3-du_{12}, $ĝi_6$-a Lu-$^{d}_{2}$-Šara-e e_2 Ur-^{d}Iškur-ra-ka hul_2-la-bi mu-gi_4. an-ta itud ba-zalag. Lu-$^{d}_{2}$-Šara-ke munus sag_6-ga-e igi mu-un-bar.

Lu_2-^{d}Šara: Za-e a-ba-me-en?

$Geme_2$-^{d}Ba-u_2: $Geme_2$-^{d}Ba-u_2-me-en, nu-ma-kuš. $ĝa_2$-e u_3 nu-pad_3-de_3. er_2-$ĝu_{10}$ gig-gig-am_3. ni_2-$ĝa_2$ ba-til_3.

Lu_2-^{d}Šara: $ša_3$ hul_2-la i_3-ra-gi_4-gi_4! er_2-zu ga-ab-a$\underline{h}_3$.

$Geme_2$-^{d}Ba-u_2: inim-zu zi-da $\underline{h}e_2$-a...

Lu_2-^{d}Šara: nam-til_3-zu ga-ba-ab-zu! Lu_2-^{d}Šara nar me-en. nam-$ĝu_{10}$ ba-tar, za-da ga-e-da-gub.

$Geme_2$-^{d}Ba-u_2: $ĝi_6$-bi $niĝ_2$ nu-til $\underline{h}e_2$-a!

The neighbor

After he had some wine and played the harp in the city, at night, Lu-Šara returned merrily to Ur-Iškur's house. The moon shone from the sky. Lu-Šara saw a beautiful woman.

Lu-Šara: Who are you?

Geme-Bau: I'm Geme-Bau, the widow. I cannot find sleep, my tears are bitter. By myself I have lived...

Lu-Šara: Happiness shall be returned to you! I shall dry your tears!

Geme-Bau: May your words be true...

Lu-Šara: Let me get to know your life! I am Lu-Šara the musician. My fate is decided, with you let me stand!

Geme-Bau: Oh may this night never end!

7.2 GRAMMAR

7.2.1 Maru

Introduction

The imperfect, or **maru**, is the Sumerian tense which expresses the idea that an action is unfinished or ongoing. Usually that translates into English present progressive or future tense. **maru**-forms are also used to describe potential actions that have not been started or might never start — curse formulae like 'any man who erases this inscription shall see the end of his offspring' is formulated in **maru** — even if no one actually touched the inscription yet.

maru-forms are quite a bit more rare than **$\underline{h}$amtu** in the Sumerian corpus, so their grammar tends to be somewhat less certain.

One of the most tantalizing features is *split-ergativity* — in **maru** the Sumerian verb seems to mark agent and object reversed to how this works in **$\underline{h}$amtu** — *but only when an agent is expressed*. In essence then the resulting pattern is more like the English subject-object marking. However, clear-cut examples for intransitive **maru**-patterns in anything different from 3rd person seem hard to come by.

For most verbs, **maru** is a regular form, but there are several classes of irregular verbs that show unexpected patterns — sometimes the stem is reduplicated, sometimes even a different root is used.

Regular formation

Most verbs form the **maru**-stem by appending the ending **-e** to the root. This may be written with or without picking up the last consonant of the root (if there is one):

du$_3$ (to build) > du$_3$-e
nam — tar (to decree a fate) > nam — tar-re

Alternatively, vowel harmony just repeats the root vowel (and if the root ends in a consonant, that is picked up):

du$_3$ (to build) > du$_3$-u$_3$
šum (to give) > šum-mu
gub (to stand) > gub-bu

Irregular formations

For several verbs, some of them common, the **maru** stem is formed in a different way. Appendix C gives a list of these verbs and their patterns.

For instance, the root can be reduplicated:

gi$_4$ (to return) > gi$_4$-gi$_4$
zu (to know) > zu-zu
gul (to destroy) > gul-gul

Often the final consonant is shed:

g̃ar (to place) > g̃a$_2$-g̃a$_2$
nag̃ (to drink) > na$_8$-na$_8$

Other verbs change to a different root (this actually occurs in English as well, consider the pattern 'go — went — gone'). Sometimes the stems also differ in singular and plural.

du$_{11}$ (to speak, to do) > e
g̃en (to go) > du
uš$_2$ (to die) > ug$_5$

Changed stems may or may not be marked with an **-e** in addition. Often, these stem changes are not at all apparent in cuneiform because all forms are written with the same sign — it is just the reading that is changed.

Ergative and object pronouns in maru

In sentences with an agent, agent and object pronouns trade places. The agent marker looks *almost* like the object marker for **ḫamtu**-stems:

Subject	Singular	Plural
1. Person	-(e)n	-en-de$_3$-en (we)
2. Person	-(e)n	-en-ze$_2$-en (you)
3. Person	∅ (he, she)	-(e)-ne (they)

In other words, the marker for the agent is no longer just before the root but moves behind the root.

ki mu-**e**-zu (you have known the place)
ki mu-zu-zu-**un** (you shall know the place)

In contrast, a direct object is marked similar to the agent in **ḫamtu** (but in practice, mostly 3rd person forms are found as **-n-** (personal) or **-b-** (impersonal), with **-ne-** as plural):

mu-e-zu(-∅) (you have known it)
mu-ub-zu-zu-en (you shall know it)
mu-ub-du$_3$-e (he shall build it)
mu-un-pad$_3$-de$_3$-ne (they will find him)
mu-ne-pad$_3$-de$_3$ (he will find them)

So far, there's nothing about *split-ergativity* — the markers for agent and object just trade places. The interesting thing happens with agentless verbs — in this case, the object marker is *not* moved before the verbal root. Consider the sentence **tur**$_3$ **nu-du**$_3$**-e** 'a pen is not being built'. In **ḫamtu** it would read **tur**$_3$ **nu-du**$_3$ 'a pen has not been built' — there's no agent so no marker comes between **nu-** and **du**$_3$ and the lack of any ending means a 3rd person object. If thing would work as in an agentless sentence, we would have to shift that (invisible) 3rd person marker before the root in **maru** and find ***nu-ub-du*$_3$*-e* — but in fact we do not, the **maru**-form exactly parallels the **ḫamtu**-form here.

This is where the notion of split ergativity arises, in **maru** Sumerian does not — for whatever reason — behave like an ergative language any more, rather the object of an agentless sentence is treated just like the agent in a sentence with agent — and this is subject – object marking.

en-na ba-ug$_5$-ge (until he shall die)
ba-du-un (I shall walk)

The maru-participle

Just like the **ḫamtu** stem serves as general timeless participle, the **maru**-stem without any prefix serves as a participle that puts some emphasis on on the duration, potentiality of repetition of the described action. As such, it can usually be translated with the English present participle.

The precise nuances of the difference between participles are hard to understand and capture, but by and large it seems to be something like this:

me gul (a destructive power, i.e. an unchanging characteristic)
me gul-gul (a power that currently goes about destroying things)
niğ$_2$ tuku (having things, i.e. rich, a characteristic without reference to time)
niğ$_2$ tuk-tuk (currently possessing things)
u$_4$ ug$_5$-ge-ni (his dying day, **maru** emphasizes the event's unknown date)
lugal e$_2$ du$_3$ (a king in the habit of building temples)
lugal e$_2$ du$_3$-e (a king currently building a temple)

In actual Sumerian texts, **maru**-stems unfortunately aren't always spelled out, sometimes the tense is just to be understood from the context.

Matching English and Sumerian tense

Matching Sumerian with English tense can be challenging because the Sumerian concept is so different. Yet in some cases, it is straightforward.

Consider the class of verbs which describe an event that happens at a point in time such as 'to give'. When the event is over and something has been given, the verbal action is finished and hence in **ḫamtu**, when the event is not over the verbal action is unfinished and hence **maru**.

This is different for verbs which describe an extended activity such as 'to learn'. Here the verbal action might have been started and finished before the time of speaking (**ḫamtu**), it might yet have to start (**maru**) — but what if it has started already and is ongoing? In English we'd use present (progressive) tense 'I am currently learning' to distinguish that from the case that never started 'I will be learning' — in Sumerian both cases are equally unfinished.

First, note that a verb may not be classified the same as in English. Consider 'to love' which is an extended activity. Its Sumerian equivalent is **ki — aḡ$_2$** and that is a compound verb using **aḡ$_2$** 'to mete out, hand out, pay' which is frequently used for grain handover. So the Sumerian mental image is more akin to English 'to give one's love' — and that is a point in time event verb. 'I have loved you' means it's over, but 'I have given you my love' means it may well still be ongoing. So Sumerian 'I love you' might most plausibly be rendered in **ḫamtu**. Similar with facts — statements of facts like 'X exceeds Y in size' are conceptually not 'finished' in any sense and continue to be true, yet typically appear as **ḫamtu** in Sumerian (presumably because their truth is established).

Another way to express timeless truths is the stative prefix **al-**.

For verbs which describe a finite duration activity, as we will see later with prospective **u$_3$-** and in the next lesson with relative sentences, Sumerian has its ways to express the relative time ordering of events quite well, so this kind of context usually makes it clear to what English translation a Sumerian tense has to be matched.

Finally, participles are quite important to express some temporal ideas in Sumerian. An expression like

eš ku$_3$-ku$_3$-ge-me-en (I purify the shrine)

using a reduplicated **maru**-participle with the copula makes it clear that the activity is repeating and ongoing (because it is a ritual activity). We will discuss the full range of expressions with particples only in the second part of this course though.

7.2.2 Optative ḫe$_2$

When discussing the negative **nu-** in section 4.2.4, we've encountered a *modal prefix*. Loosely speaking, these come before any conjugation prefix and modify the meaning of the verb. While **nu-** negates the verb, one function of **ḫe$_2$-** is to turn the verbal action into a wish. This often combines with **maru** as tense, because naturally a wish is an action that has not been completed. This is not all this particular prefix does — we will encounter other functions of it at a later stage.

Just as **nu-** can change its form for vowel harmony when it meets other prefixes, so can **ḫe$_2$-** — in front of **mu-** it changes into **ḫu-mu-** and with **ba-** it combines as **ḫa-ba-**.

ki mu-ub-zu-zu (he will know the place)
ki hu-mu-ub-zu-zu (may he know the place!)
ḫa-ba-ug$_5$-ge (may he die!)

In the first lesson, we've already seen that the prefix combines with the copula just as well:

silim-ma ḫe$_2$ me-en! (may you be in peace!)

Often, the phrase **ḫe$_2$-am$_3$** 'may it be' is just expressed as a short **ḫe$_2$-a** or even just **ḫe$_2$**.

Note that it is not possible to combine the prefix with **nu-** to formulate a negative wish 'may X not happen' — this uses a different modal prefix. The general principle is that all the model prefixes form a class of elements out of which only one may ever be used per verbal chain.

7.2.3 Cohortative ga-

The cohortative, another model prefix, is a 1st person form in which the speaker urges himself on to do something — he forms a resolution or a wish. In Sumerian, this is expressed with the model prefix **ga-**.

Oddly enough, this prefix usually is combined with **ḫamtu**-stems — but the resulting verbal form is subject to split ergativity just as if there were a **maru**-stem, i.e. direct objects are marked in the ergative spot.

Because it is by nature a 1st person form, no 1st person agent or subject needs to be specified.

iri-še$_3$ ga-mu-ub-ši-g̃en (let me go to the city!)
kaš ga-mu-na-šum$_2$ (let me give beer to him!)
diĝir-ra e$_2$ ga-mu-na-ab-du$_3$ (I shall build a temple for the god!)

Note the split ergative pattern in the last example — **-ab-** resumes **e**$_2$ as object in the spot that would normally indicate the **ḫamtu**-agent.

7.2.4 Prospective u$_3$-

Yet another modal prefix **u**$_3$**-** serves to indicate that one event took place *before* another. A sentence in which the verb is marked with this prefix is usually in **ḫamtu** (because the event that is described has to be imagined complete) and followed by another sentence that describes what happened later. This second sentence can be in **ḫamtu** as well, in English the time ordering can then be translated using the pluperfect.

alan u$_3$-dim$_2$ ba-pad (After the statue had been built, it was smashed to pieces.)

If the second sentence is in **maru**, present and future tense are often suitable:

gud u$_3$-gaz ba-ab-gu$_7$-e (When the ox is slaughtered, it will be eaten.)

Before the conjugation prefixes **ba-** the form can appear as **a-ba-**, likewise before **bi**$_2$ as **i**$_3$**-bi**$_2$**-** (this is similar to vowel changes for the negative **nu-**).

i$_3$-bi$_2$-gub, bi$_2$-zal-e (When he stands there, he shall pass his time.)

Like **ga-**, **u**$_3$**-** sometimes appears to show split-ergativity when marking pronouns (i.e. the direct object pronoun appears in the spot we'd expect the ergative):

šu$_2$ u$_3$-ne-zi, mu-ne-gaz-e (When he does violence to them, he will slay them.)

7.2.5 Reflexive pronouns

The word **ni**$_2$ 'self' is the basis for a number of expressions that are in English translated using a reflexive pronoun. First of all, it can be combined with a possessive suffix to generate

ni$_2$-g̃u$_{10}$ (myself)
ni-zu (yourself)

These forms can subsequently be inflected:

e$_2$ ni$_2$-g̃a$_2$-ka (in the house of myself, i.e. in my own house)

Using the adverbial **-bi** and appropriate case endings, expressions like

ni$_2$-ba (in itself, on its own)
ni$_2$-bi-ta (by itself, by themselves)
ni$_2$-bi-še$_3$ (for itself)

can be formed. Other expressions use the verb **te** 'to approach) for 3rd person expressions

ni$_2$-te-ni$_2$ (himself, herself)
ni$_2$-te-na (his own)
ni$_2$-te-a-ni-ta (by his own free will)

Gramatically these expressions are noun chains.

kaš ni$_2$-te-na in-naĝ (he drank his own beer)
ni$_2$-te-a-ni-ta iri-ta im-ta-ĝen (by his own free will he left the city)

7.3 VOCABULARY

Sumerian	English
aḫ$_3$	to dry
dim$_2$	to create, make
du$_{12}$	music
en-na	until
er$_2$	tears
gaz	to kill
gud	ox
gul	to destroy
ĝi$_6$	night
ĝiri$_3$	foot
ḫa-lam	to forsake, destroy
itud	moon
nam-lu$_2$-lu$_7$	population, humanity
ni$_2$	self
pad	to smash, break into bits
sa	net
šuš	to cover, envelop
šu — zi	to do violence
tur$_3$	stall
u$_3$	sleep
usar	(female) neighbor
zal	to pass time

7.4 CONVERSATION — VISITING A TEMPLE

The precise idea of Sumerian priesthood is a bit sketchy, but if you visit the main temple of a city, the highest divine representative there is likely to be the **en** priest. The **en** is resident in the temple, in a cloister called **gi$_6$-par$_4$**.

At least one of the function of the **išib** is to purify spaces for ritual. As kings claimed that function, it seems to be important. The **gudug**-priest is responsible for the day to day cultic care of the statue of a god or goddess. The **saĝĝa** on the other hand has a more mundane role — he is the chief administrator of the temple.

People come to the temple to bring offerings and pray. The simplest offerings can be food, but all sorts of objects can also be dedicated, in particular artfully inscribed seals were popular.

Like royalty, the gods also have their specific titles — in addressing them, it is important to know these.

^{d}inanna nin kur-kur-ra (Inanna, lady of the hills)
^{d}nin-gir-su ur-saĝ kala-ga ^{d}en-lil$_2$-la$_2$ (Ningirsu, mighty hero of Enlil)
^{d}ba-u$_2$ munus sa$_6$-ga, dumu an-na nin iri ku$_3$-ga
(Bau, beautiful woman, daughter of the heaven, lady of the pure city)
^{d}en-lil$_2$ lugal an-ki-bi-da (Enlil king of heaven and earth)
^{d}nin-ĝiš-zi-da diĝir-ĝu$_{10}$ (Ningišzida my god)

You can begin a prayer with phrases like

nam-šub mu-ra-tum (a prayer I have brought to you)
nindaba mu-ra-tum (a food offering I have brought to you)
alan-bi a mu-ra-ru (this statue I have dedicated for you)

Finally you can state your request from the deity:

a$_2$-ta$\underline{h}$-ĝu$_{10}$ $\underline{h}$e$_2$-me (my help be thou!)
nam-til-ĝu$_{10}$-še$_3$ (for my long life)
a$_2$ $\underline{h}$e$_2$-šum$_2$-mu-un (may you give strength!)

Some votive gifts: kišib$_3$ (seal), alan (statue), ^{d}lamma (figurine), nindaba (food offering), na-ru$_2$-a (stele), bara$_2$ (altar)

Other useful words: šud$_3$ (prayer), nam-šub (incantation), e$_2$ (temple), eš (shrine)

7.5 PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Translate the following expressions into English: a) en-na gi$_4$-gi$_4$-in b) šu-ĝu$_{10}$ im-zi-zi-ge-en c) gud in-gaz-ze$_2$ d) geštug i$_3$-zu-zu-un e) ša$_3$ ^{d}en-lil$_2$-la$_2$ ba-pad$_3$-de$_3$ f)

Exercise 2: Translate the following expressions into Sumerian: a) When you have brought beer, I will drink it. b) I shall destroy that city! c) May you smash the pot! d) a man slaughtering sheep e) Let me raise my hands to heaven! f) he will know when you die

Exercise 3: Change into **maru**: a) e$_2$ ba-du$_3$ b) kaš mu-un-naĝ c) bi$_2$-e-ĝar d) niĝ$_2$ ki-aĝ$_2$ e) ba-an-zal f) inim-bi mu-du$_{11}$

Exercise 4: Form the right participle for the given verbal root:

a) the pot that is smashed (**pad**)

b) you have to stop killing people (**gaz**)

c) a shining star (**zalag**)

d) the ever-joyful wife (**$\underline{h}$ul**)

e) the peace-loving king (**ki — aĝ$_2$**)

Exercise 5: Translate:

a) kaš ni$_2$-te-na in-naĝ

b) ni$_2$-te-ĝu$_{10}$-ta inim-bi mu-sar

c) ni-zu-še$_3$ igi bar-ra!

d) ni-za ba-zal-le-en!

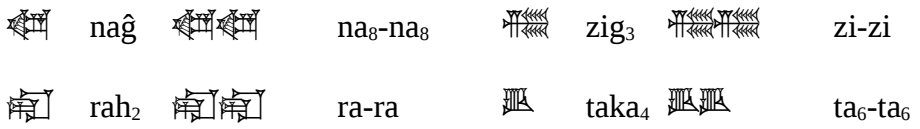
e) ni-ĝu$_{10}$ igi mu-bar

7.6 READING CUNEIFORM

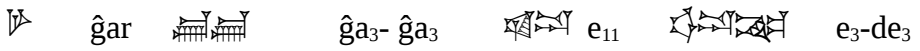
7.6.1 Irregular verbs

A list of the inflection of irregular verbs is in appendix C as transliterated text. However, it is instructive to see how some of these verbs look in cuneiform.

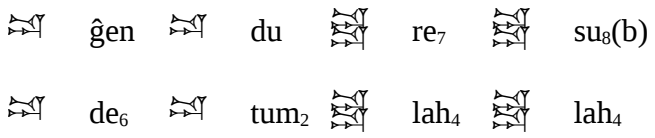
Many verbs of the reduplication class which alter the syllables do not change cuneiform at all — just the reading of the signs changes somewhat:



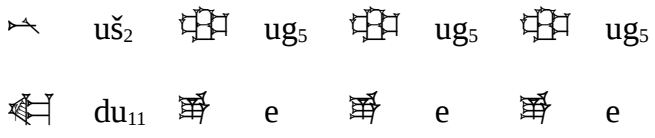
This however isn't a hard and fast rule — other reduplicating verbs do change the cuneiform writing:



Of the more wildly irregular verbs, **ĝen** and **de**$_6$ show different roots in **maru** — yet the cuneiform writing does not change at all, however both verbs mark plural with a vertical doubling of the DU sign:



On the other hand, **du**$_{11}$ and **uš**$_2$ change sign and reading (although instead of **ug**$_5$ also **ug**$_7$ is permissible which is written just like **uš**$_2$).



All in all, there don't seem to be reliable rules how irregular verbs should be written. It is however easy to miss from the cuneiform writing that some verbs are irregular at all.

7.6.2 Modal prefixes

As the modal prefixes **he**$_2$**-** and **u**$_3$**-** can look quite differently before conjugation prefixes due to vowel harmony, memorize the cuneiform combinations in which they usually occur:

 he_2-  ha-ba-  hu-mu-

 u_3-  a-ba-  i_3-bi_2-

It is very useful to reliably identify model prefixes, because they mark the beginning of the verbal chain.

7.6.3 Compound words

We've already seen that Sumerian names often have a meaning when broken down into their component parts. For instance, **Geme**$_2$-^{d}**Nin-gal** would translate as 'maid of Ningal' and Ningal in turn as 'great lady'.

The same is true for normal nouns — a share of them can be analyzed in terms of their component parts. This isn't syllabic writing (because the individual logograms have maening) and it isn't a compound sign either (because the reading doesn't change). Consider the following words (which are listed as single words on ePSD):

 sa-šuš-gal  nig̃-a_2-zi

The first one translates as 'fishing net' and the second as 'violence'. However, **sa** is just 'net' and **šuš** a verb 'to cover, enfold', used as a participle it would hence just mean 'catching net' — and adding **gal** as adjective, we can understand it as 'great catching net'.

This doesn't mean that it wouldn't be a single word — words do merge into compounds over time. We just can't be sure.

a$_2$**-zi** is a raised arm. Just as in English 'to raise one's hand against…' in Sumerian this is a metaphor for violence. Gramatically **a**$_2$ **— zi** can be understood as the participle of a compound verb that simply qualifies **nig̃**$_2$ — so 'something violent'.

The fact that we (or a scribe) could, over time, easily come to miss the nature of such compound words in essence means, that the boundary between compound logogram words and syllabic writings can be blurred — for instance the writing **nig̃**$_2$**-a-zi** in which **a** is simply syllabic writing is also known.

Some care as to be taken to recognize compound words wherever this is possible.

In this course, usually only the individual elements are listed in the cuneiform sign lists, so you're expected to figure out the meaning of compound words from the elements when doing the reading exercises.

7.6.4 Sign list

Logograms and compound sign readings:

	GIR_3	$ĝiri_3$		LAL_2.SAR	usar
	BALAG	balaĝ		UDx(U.U.U)	itud
	TUK	du_{12}		A.IGI	er_2
	$ŠA_6$	sa_6		NI_2	ni_2
	TI	ti, til_3		UD	ah_3
	SA	sa		U	šuš

Syllabic readings:

	SU	kuš		IGI.DIB	u_3
	HA	ha		URUxMIN	lu_7
	LAM	lam			

7.6.5 Exercise

This lesson's reading exercise is the end of a longer Sumerian prose text from the foundation cone of Entemena describing the war of Lagaš against Umma. It is a threat made against the enemy ever returning, and the grammar resonates nicely with the theme of the lesson.

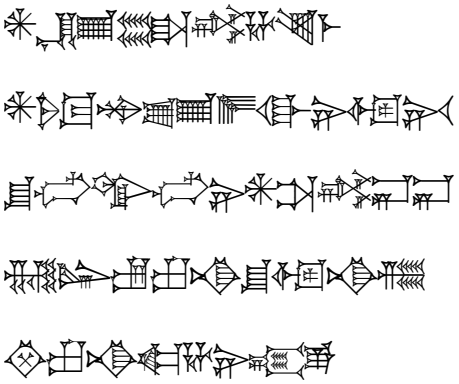
If you enter the number into the CDLI engine

`https://cdli.earth/search`

you can see a handcopy of the whole text (pictures of the cone can be found on Wikipedia).

Note that it is given in the original spelling that doesn't always agree with a standard orthography — in the verbs, likely two occurrances of **ni** need to be read phonetically as $\mathbf{ne}_2$ and one **na** as $\mathbf{ne}_6$, in every case meaning the pronoun **ne**.

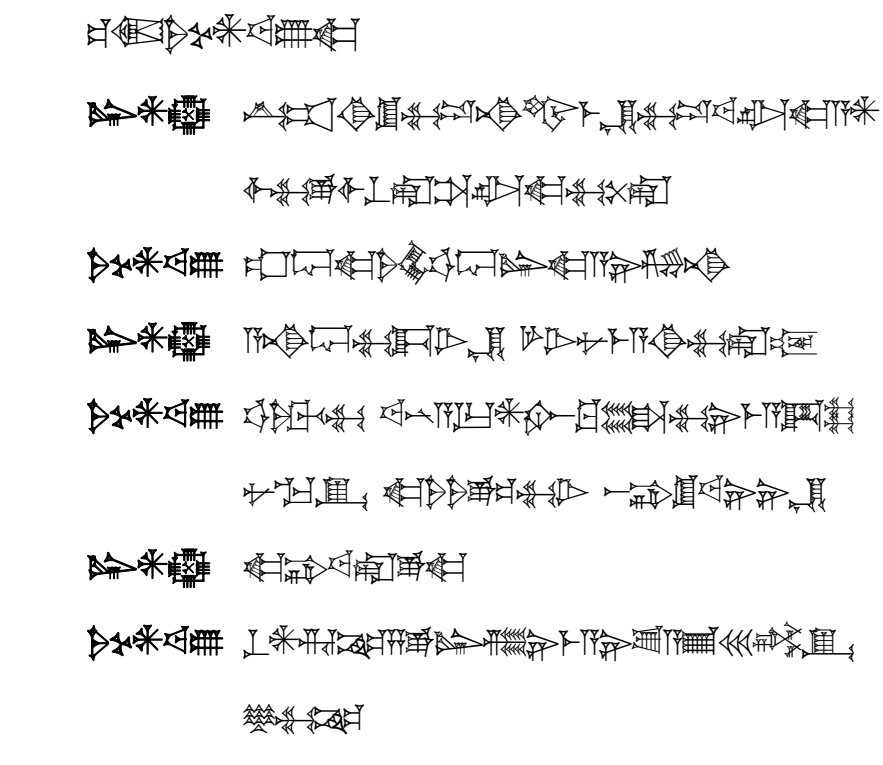
P222532



Lesson 8

RELATIVE CLAUSES

8.1 TEXT



G̃iš-nud Geme$_2$-^{d}Ba-u$_2$-ka

Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara: u$_4$ uri$_5^{ki}$-še$_3$ mu-g̃en-na, nar-me-en, mu gub-ba al-dug$_4$-am$_3$. igi-g̃u$_{10}$ e-ši-bar-ra-ta al-dug$_4$-g̃u$_{10}$ kur$_2$-ra.

Geme$_2$-^{d}Ba-u$_2$: uruda-gin$_7$ inim sal, ku$_3$-babbar-gin$_7$ lu$_2$ inim-a-ni gin$_6$-na.

Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara: a-na-gin$_7$ mu-da-du$_{12}$-en? nig̃-tuku nu-me-a ki mu-ra-ag̃$_2$.

Geme$_2$-^{d}Ba-u$_2$: u$_4$ dam-gu$_{10}$ ba-uš$_2$-a, Ur-^{d}Iškur ku-li-gu$_{10}$ i$_3$-me-a, a$_2$-tah̲ nu-ma-g̃al$_2$. inim sal-sal-e g̃iš mu-tuku... dili-bi-še$_3$ ba-zal-zal-en.

Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara: Inim-bi ba-ra-e-du$_{11}$!

Geme$_2$-^{d}Ba-u$_2$: bar dig̃ir-re-ne za-e lu$_2$ zi i$_3$-me-a i$_3$-zu-a-ke$_4$-eš, h̲e$_2$-g̃al$_2$ šum-mu-ne...

In Geme-Bau's bed

Lu-Šara: When I came to Ur, being a musician, an established name was what I wanted. From the moment I laid eyes on you, my desire has been different.

Geme-Bau: Like copper is a fine word, but like silver is a man who makes his word true.

Lu-Šara: How can I marry? Although I am not rich, I still love you!

Geme-Bau: Although Ur-Iškur was always my friend, when my husband died there was no one to help for me. Many fine words I have heard... alone I passed time and more time.

Lu-Šara: Don't say such a thing!

Geme-Bau: Because the gods know that you are an honest man, they will provide plenty...

8.2 GRAMMAR

8.2.1 Relative clauses

Introduction

In 5.2.3, we've seen how a simple relative sentence can be rendered using a participle that can optionally be further qualified. For instance, **e$_2$ iri-a du$_3$-a** 'the house that has been built in the city' uses the qualifier **iri-a** for the participle **du$_3$-a**.

However, the ending **-a** is even more flexible — it can transform a whole sentence into a noun chain that stands in apposition to another noun, and this noun chain in addition can be modified with suitable endings.

Consider the phrase **e$_2$ iri-a bi$_2$-du$_3$** 'the house was built in the city'. With the *nominalizing ending* **-a** this becomes **e$_2$ iri-a bi$_2$-du$_3$-a** 'the house that was built in the city' (note that the last verb form is not a participle any more because it has a conjugation prefix).

This can now combined with a different sentence by writing the nominalized first sentence as apposition like **e$_2$-bi g̃a$_2$-a-kam** 'this is my house' as **e$_2$-bi *(e$_2$) iri-a bi$_2$-du$_3$-a* g̃a$_2$-a-kam** 'this house that was built in the city is mine'.

The copula and relative clauses

There are two situations in which the Sumerian 'to be' might be translated into an English relative clause. One of them is a short, explanatory insertion of the copula, similar to an apposition:

Ur-^{d}iškur dub-sar-am$_3$ gi-dub-ba-ta mu-un-sar
(Ur-Iškur, he being a scribe, uses a stylus.)

The same phrase might equally well be translated 'who is a scribe' or with a stronger nuance 'because he is a scribe'. The use of the copula here carries a measure of emphasis that is not conveyed by the apposition **Ur-^{d}Iškur dub-sar**.

But like verbs, the copula can also be properly nominalized using the ending **-a**. In this case, even in 3rd person, the form **-me-** is taken and to produce a proper verb form, the prefix **i$_3$-** is used (unless there is a modal prefix like **nu-** present of course).

The meaning in this case is often something like 'even though'.

Lu$_2$-^{d}Šara dub-sar nu-me-a gi-dub-ba-ta mu-un-sar
(Lu-Šara, although he is not a scribe, uses a stylus.)

If the nominalized copula ends up as a direct object, the translation would however be a relative pronoun 'that':

Ur-^{d}Iškur dub-sar i$_3$-me-a mu-e-zu (You know that Ur-Iškur is a scribe.)

Relative pronouns

For relative sentences which are grammatically an apposition, a relative pronoun like **lu$_2$** can be introduced to avoid repetition. Consider the two sentences **maškim gibil iri-še$_3$ mu-g̃en** 'the new administrator came to the city' and **maškim-e alan-e a mu-un-ru** 'the administrator dedicated a statue'.

The sentences can be joined by first replacing **maškim** with **lu$_2$**, for instance in the second sentence, yielding **lu$_2$-e alan-e a mu-un-ru** 'the person dedicated a statue'.

This can now be moved in apposition after being nominalized with the ending **-a**, yielding

maškim gibil lu$_2$ alan-e a mu-un-ru-a iri-še$_3$ mu-g̃en
(the new administrator who dedicated a statue came to the city)

Since the relative phrase **lu$_2$ alan-e a mu-un-ru-a** is in apposition to **maškim gibil**, it of course inherits its case markers. The original sentence **maškim-e alan-e a mu-un-ru** had **maškim** marked as agent for ergative case, but we've already learned when discussing participles that internal case markers tend to be dropped, so the relative pronoun remains unmarked.

What if we had reversed the insertion, i.e. had started from **lu$_2$ gibil iri-še$_3$ mu-g̃en**, had nominalized that and inserted it into the second sentence? In this case, the result would be

maškim lu$_2$ gibil iri-še$_3$ mu-g̃en-na alan-e a mu-un-ru
(the administrator, the new one who came to the city, dedicated a statue)

At first glance, there is no ergative ending here either despite the fact that in the original sentence there was — except that it actually is here, just phonology interferes and it happens to be absorbed into the nominalizing ending like **mu-g̃en-na[-e]**.

Thus, more often than not, visible ergative case markers tend to disappear in relative sentences.

Just as **lu$_2$** can be used to express the English 'who', **nig̃** can take the role of 'that' or **ki** can translate the idea of 'where'.

kisal ki iri-a mu-e-zu-a-a bi$_2$-gub-be-en
(In the courtyard, the place in the city you have known, I shall stand)

(Note in this example the ending of **mu-e-zu-a-a** — here the locative ending, being phonetically more stable, has *not* been deleted and is simply appended to the nominalizing ending.)

^{gis}tukul niĝ lugal-e mu-ra-šum$_2$-ma ba-gul-gul
(the weapon which the king gave to you shall be destroyed)

Temporal clauses

There are a number of standard expressions involving the nominalizing ending **-a** that provide Sumerian temporal clauses.

u$_4$ [sentence]-a-a (when, on the day that)
u$_4$ [sentence]-a-ta (since, after, from the day that)
u$_4$ [sentence]-a-gin$_7$ (during, while, like the day that)
mu [sentence]-a-a (in the year that)
eger [sentence]-a-ta (after)
en-na [sentence]-a-še$_3$ (until, as long as)

(the last two expressions can also have spatial meanings like 'from the back of' or 'as far as').

u$_4$ ^{d}Ba-u$_2$ igi zi iri-še$_3$ im-ši-bar-ra-a (when Bau cast her true eye on the city)
u$_4$ e$_2$ an-na ba-du$_3$-a-ta (after Eanna was built)
u$_4$ sila$_4$ ba-šeĝ$_6$-ĝa-gin$_7$ (while the lamb was being roasted)
eger eš$_3$ kur-kur-a ba-gul-la-ta (after the shrine in the hills had been destroyed)
en-na i-ĝen-na-aš (until he has come)

A number of common temporal expressions follow this pattern:

u$_4$-ba (at that time, then)
u$_4$-bi$_2$-ta (from that time on, afterwards)
u$_4$-da (on the day)

Causal clauses

With different head nouns and ending combinations, the idea of a causal sequence can be expressed.

bar [sentence]-a-ke$_4$-eš (because, for the sake of, instead of)
mu [sentence]-a-(ak)-še$_3$ (because, instead of, about)
nam [sentence]-a-ke$_4$-eš (since, on the occasion of, it being so that)

Several examples of causal constructions:

mu e$_2$-a-ni ba-gul-la-še$_3$ (because his temple had been destroyed)
bar lugal i-me-a mu-zu-a-ke$_4$-eš (because I have known that he was a king)
nam arad ba-ĝen-na-ke$_4$-eš (it being so that the servant had gone away)

There are a number of short common causal expressions that use such patterns:

bar ĝu$_{10}$-a (for my sake)
bar zu-še$_3$ (because of you)
bar-bi$_2$-ta (because of this)
mu-bi$_2$-še$_3$ (because of that)
nam-bi$_2$-še$_3$ (therefore)

Idiomatic shortenings

The correct understanding of Sumerian relative clauses is made difficult by the fact that elements may be left out because they are assumed to be understood. For instance relative pronouns (in particular **u**$_4$) may simply be omitted in writing and the ending combination **-a-a** resulting from nominalizing **-a** followed by locative **-a** frequently is shortened to just **-a**.

Thus, the above example sentence **u**$_4$ ^{d}**Ba-u**$_2$ **igi zi iri-še**$_3$ **im-ši-bar-ra-a** may actually appear just as ^{d}**Ba-u**$_2$ **igi zi iri-še**$_3$ **im-ši-bar-ra** — which requires a fair share of educated guessing to be understood correctly.

8.2.2 Expressing ability

The notion that someone is able to do something is somewhat odd to express in Sumerian. The comitative case is used — only in the verbal chain — so say literally that someone did something together with himself. The intended meaning is then one of ability:

e$_2$ in-da-an-du$_3$ (he was able to build the house)
mu-da-sar (I was able to write)

8.2.3 The prohibitive prefix

We've stated earlier in 5.2.2 that an imperative form cannot be negated, i.e. it cannot be used to state things like 'you shall not do that'. In order to do that in Sumerian, a negative wish need to be made. Just as wishes are expressed using the modal prefix **he**$_2$**-**, negative wishes and prohibitions can be expressed using another modal prefix **ba-ra-**. This has the meaning of 'can not', 'must not', 'shall not'.

If the meaning is 'can not', the tense can be *ḫamtu*, otherwise *maru* is more appropriate as the outcome is not definite.

ša$_3$-g̃u$_{10}$ ba-ra-ba-zu-zu-un (you shall not know my heart)
ku$_3$-babbar ba-ra-šum-mu (he must not give away the silver)
ba-ra-bi$_2$-g̃ar (I cannot place it here)

8.2.4 ḫamtu *verb reduplication*

In 7.2.1, we've seen that a few verbs form the *maru* stem by doubling the root, for instance **zu** 'to know' becomes **zu-zu** in *maru*.

Unfortunately, it isn't true that when you see a verbal root reduplication (which is fairly obvious to see in cuneiform — usually it's a repeated sign) you can assume you're dealing with a *maru* tense. Verbal stems in *ḫamtu* double just as well.

The reasons are pretty much the same as for adjectives — either the reduplication expresses plurality or increased intensity.

How then can one tell? There's only a handful of verbs which form *maru* by reduplication — so if whenever you see a stem that is repeated and the verb isn't one of those, you can safely assume it's *ḫamtu*. If a plural translation makes sense, that is probably the meaning, otherwise intensity is expressed.

Note also that the *maru* stem isn't always a strict reduplication, forms with partial doubling (usually with syllabic writing) occur frequently. *ḫamtu*-reduplication on the other hand is always a doubling of the root.

diĝir-re-ne g̃eštug mu-šum-šum (the gods give wisdom)
mu-e-da-an-gub-gub (he stood firmly with you)

8.3 VOCABULARY

Sumerian	English
alan	statue
al-dug$_4$	desire
amar	calf
a — ru	to dedicate
a$_2$-taḫ	helper
bara$_2$ si-ga	pedestal
bu$_3$-ra	to cut, destroy
dili	single, alone
du$_{12}$	to marry
eš$_3$	shrine
gibil	new
gin$_6$	to make firm
g̃eštug	wisdom
g̃iš-nud	bed
ḫe$_2$-g̃al$_2$	plenty
kisal	courtyard
kur$_2$	to change
ma-mu$_2$(d)	dream
nam — kur$_5$	to curse
numun	seed, offspring
sag̃-us$_2$	supporter, patron
sal	thin, fine
^{gis}tukul	weapon, mace

8.4 TRANSLATION PHILOSOPHY — MANY MEANINGS

If you browse through a Sumerian dictionary (say ePSD), you might notice that often Sumerian words have a large variety of English translations, for instance for **pad**$_3$ we read 'to find, discover; to name, nominate; to swear; to choose; to adjure'; as a second example consider **mu** which we've variously rendered as 'year, oath, text, name'.

It is certainly true that an English word might also have a large range of meanings, take 'to charge' for example which can mean a cavalry attack, restoring a battery or formally accuse someone of a crime (among other things). English even has words that can denote opposite things like 'to cleave' — which can mean 'to split apart' or 'to stick together'.

But there's almost certainly more going on here.

Words in a language name concepts of thought. For concrete things like 'tree' or 'head', these concepts are straightforward and do not differ much between languages, but abstract ideas are different — each culture uses its own set of concepts to structure the world. Take the word 'god' — the omnipotent Elohim of the Hebrew Bible is very different from the all too human gods of Greek mythology, yet we translate the same.

Thus, we have a be aware of the fact that concepts in Sumerian are shifted from what they are in English — the fact that **mu** has so many different translations basically means that **mu** has no proper English equivalent, when the Sumerians used the word, they really thought of a concept that doesn't exist for an English-thinking mind.

We can, by looking at the range of translations, usually get some insight into what the theme of a Sumerian word is. For instance a **mu** must be something like 'an idea put into words' — if it is written down **mu sar-ra** it becomes an inscription, if it captures the essence of a person it is a name (remember that Sumerian names frequently have translatable meaning). Sumerian years weren't counted by number but also named, hence **mu** also plausibly came to denote 'year'. Similarly, **pad**$_3$ seems to have the connotation of singling out something in a multitude, and when combined with **mu**, the meaning becomes something like 'to single out that particular idea and make it special' — an oath is basically just a strongly confirmed idea.

In learning Sumerian vocabulary, we should ultimately strive to understand the concepts as they appeared to a Sumerian mind rather than garther ever-growing lists of incomplete English meanings.

8.5 PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Translate the following expressions into English:

a) lugal alan-e a in-ru-a ba-uš$_2$

b) bar Ur-^{d}Iškur dub-sar i$_3$-me-a-ke$_4$-eš niğ$_2$-tuku-am$_3$

c) u$_4$-da Ur-^{d}Nammu e$_2$ En-lil$_2$-la$_2$ mu-na-du$_3$-a dumu-ni ba-tud

d) ba-ra-ma-e-šum

e) diğir-re-ne im-ḫul$_2$-ḫul$_2$

f) alan mu-un-da-an-dim

g) bar-bi$_2$-ta ba-du

h) bar numun-na-ne nam ba-tar-ra-ke$_4$-še$_3$ dumu ba-ra-tu-de$_2$

Exercise 2: Translate the following expressions into Sumerian:

a) Since Enlil has given me strength I am not alone.

b) The foreman who shouted at the porter went away.

c) From the time he was proclaimed king, Ur-Nammu was a great man.

d) You shall not know it!

e) You cannot change your fate.

f) I am able to change my fate.

g) I will stand where the wall was destroyed.

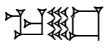
8.6 READING CUNEIFORM

8.6.1 Orthography

If you've been working through the course so far, you've hopefully learned that the *sound* of the syllables as we transliterate it isn't defining a word — **e** 'canal', **e**$_2$ 'house' and **e**$_2$ 'to leave' are all different words. You might instead have come to the reasonable (and entirely pardonable) conclusion that the identity of a written word is defined by the *cuneiform signs* used to imprint it into clay.

Unfortunately, that too is not true.

If you look up words on ePSD, you can frequently find a bewildering variety of spellings. Consider the most common spelling of **ma-mu**$_2$ 'dream' (which is usually not written using the more common **mu**) — yet each of the two signs can be replaced by an alternative with the same reading:

 ma-mu$_2$  ma-mu  ma$_2$-mu$_2$

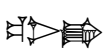
Some spellings can be a simple slip — **ma**$_2$**-mu**$_2$ occurs just once, so it might be explained by a scribe drifting to the wrong sign (though with the correct syllabic value) in a hurry. Other spellings seem no accident though — although **ma-mu** is the *oldest* attested spelling (and seems completely syllabic), **ma-mu**$_2$ is most commonly found.

At times, one gets the distinct feeling that the scribe simply didn't remember a logogram and just made something up on the spot — consider the following variant of **nu-siki** 'orphan':

 nu-siki  nu-us$_2$-ki-ki

A few other developments can be seen with **ĝeštug** 'wisdom, ear'. Here the first line shows common variants, the second line rare spellings (all in all, a good 70 different spellings exist):

 ĝeštug  ĝeštug$_2$  ĝeštug$_3$

 ĝiš-tug$_2$  $^{\text{ĝiš}}$ĝeštug  ĝiš-du$_3$-ga

Usually the word is written as logogram using the PI sign, but often a *phonetic complement*, i.e. the sound value in syllabic writing is added, creating a compound sign. Sometimes the syllabic writing comes *before* the logogram, sometimes it surrounds it. All these are stylistic variants representing different orthography.

Syllabic writings and incomplete phonetic complement on the other hand are fairly rare, they seem to be scribal slips — especially the rather exotic spelling **ĝiš-du**$_3$**-ga**.

Thus, while some weird forms can be understood as scribes making up for a sign they didn't remember, Sumerian apparently didn't have any standardized orthography, there was a range what was still permissible and could still be recognized as 'the same word'.

This of course is unfortunate from the point of view of a student who tries to match a vocabulary item he remembers with the cuneiform he is looking at — but this is how things are. What helps a bit is to memorize common syllabic replacements, for instance **re** and **re**$_2$ can both occur as variants in syllabic writing.

8.6.2 Sign list

Logograms and compound sign readings:

	NA_2	nud		MU&MU	tah
	KA	dug_4		UD	babbar
	SAL	sal		GI	gin_6
	TUK	du_{12}		TIL	$uš_2$
	PAP	kur_2		AŠ	dili
	NI	zal		ALAN	alan
	AMAR	amar		TAR	kur_5
	KUL	numun			

Syllabic readings:

	UŠ	us_2		IB	eb

At this point, you've leanred practically all cuneiform signs which are used for syllabic writing, so this part of the list is very slim.

8.6.3 Exercise

The last reading exercise is truly a challenge — but if you master it, you're in good shape to take on nearly any votive inscription you might see on an artifact. It makes use of many of the grammatical features we have covered so far.

The original is apparently on a statue dedicated by Amar-Sin.

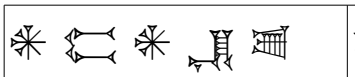
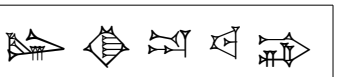
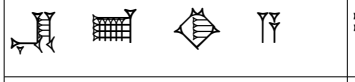
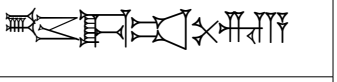
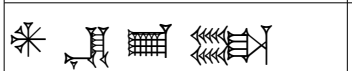
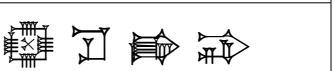
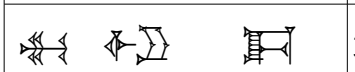
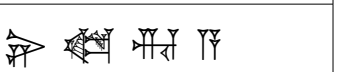
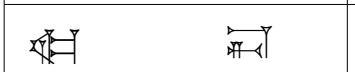
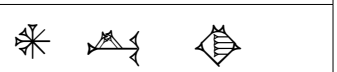
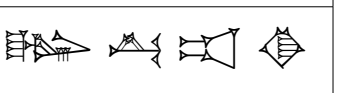
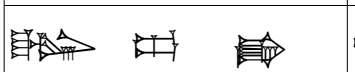
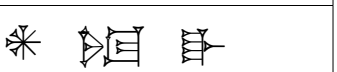
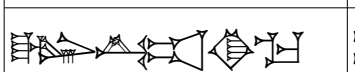
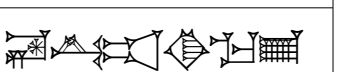
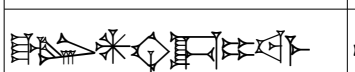
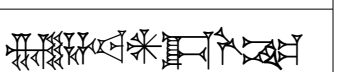
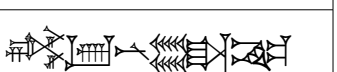
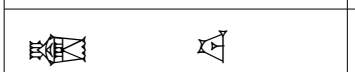
The reading direction is as we've seen before, start from the upper left, read down the first column, then start with the second column.

The inscription starts out with a collection of (hopefully) familiar stock phrases praising Amar-Sin before it lays out the name of the statue using an anticipatory genitive 'of this statue…'.

The second column then issues threads of the form 'any person who… shall …' using both the relativizing ending **-a** and **maru** forms — this is interspersed with divine titles of two deities.

In one place, a shorthand **-me** is used instead of the expected **-me-en**, also genitive shorthands occur.

Good luck!

Appendix A

NOUN AND VERBAL CHAIN

A.1 NOUN CHAIN

Noun chains can be fairly complex due to the possibility of linking individual chains into larger ones using genitive or apposition — often a case ending in a text is lines away from the head noun of the chain. In the following, we analyze first elementary (uninflected) chains and then discuss the rules how they merge into compound chains and receive case endings.

A.1.1 Uninflected chain

An uninflected noun chain consists minimally of a single noun or independent pronoun. Optionally it can contain plural markers, demonstrative or possessive pronouns, adjectives and implied conjunctions 'and'.

The order of the various optional elements is:

1. head noun

   nin 'lady'

2. reduplication or conjunction

   nin nin 'all the ladies', **lugal nin** 'king and queen'

3. adjective (possibly also with reduplication or conjunction)

   nin nin sa$_6$-ga 'all the beautiful ladies', **ki sikil ku$_3$** 'a place pure and holy'

4. demonstrative or possessive

   nin nin sa$_6$-ga-bi 'all these beautiful ladies'
   ab-ba ama ki-aĝ$_2$-ĝu$_{10}$ 'my beloved father and mother'

5. personal plural **-(e)ne**

   nin sa$_6$-ga-ne$_2$-ne 'his beautiful ladies', **diĝir gal-la-ne$_2$-ne** 'his great gods'

A.1.2 Rules of apposition

Two noun chains in apposition are simply written next to each other without modification. The result is a new, longer chain. As an example, consider the following string of royal titles, each of which is a noun chain in its own right:

1. **ur-^{d}nammu** 'Ur-Nammu'
2. **nita kala-ga** 'the mighty man'
3. **lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma** 'the king of Ur'
4. **lugal an-ub-da limmu-ba** 'the king of the four corners'

The result is a long composite chain and any case inflection or copula goes to the end of this long chain.

A.1.3 Rules of genitive construction

A genitive construction fundamentally consists of one noun chain that is qualified by a second noun chain that is inflected for genitive and follows. The result is a composite noun chain terminating in the genitive case ending (see 2.2.1). Note that the genitive ending may not be visible in writing.

In the simplest case, each noun chain consists just of a single noun:

lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma 'king of Ur'

However, both the non-inflected and the inflected spot can be taken (in principle) by long composite chains:

e$_2$ maḫ maḫ-bi ab-ba ama ki-aĝ$_2$-ĝa
'these magnificient houses of my beloved father and mother'

In particular, the noun chain that is qualified by a chain terminating in genitive can already be a genitive construction — in this case, a double genitive ending terminates the composite chain:

dam dub-sar tur lugal-la-ka 'the wife of the young scribe of the king'

In practice, no more than two genitive endings are ever written and usually no more than three genitives are ever nested this way.

A.1.4 Case inflection

A noun chain always is inflected for case — if an open case marker is missing, the chain is the direct object of the verb (or the case marker is expressed in the verbal chain).

Any case marker ends the chain, and so does the copula.

Because the case marker is the last element and because a composite chain may be very long, it can be difficult to link the case marker with the original head noun.

Consider the string of royal titles in A.1.2 — this could be terminated with **lugal an-ub-da limmu-ba-kam** 'he is…' and this would refer all the way back to the beginning 'Ur-Nammu is…'.

A.2 THE VERBAL CHAIN

Verbal chains often resume the case structure presented earlier in the sentence. This resuming is optional — nouns marked for a particular case may be resumed, pronouns that have not been written explicitely must be resumed (here 'resuming' is a bit of a misnomer).

In addition, verbs may carry additional pronominal information on direct objects and carry different nuances of meaning via unassigned case endings, the ventive element or modal prefixes.

A.2.1 Order of elements

The order of elements in the verbal chain is fixed.

1. the modal prefixes **nu-**, **he$_2$-**, **ba-ra-**, **ga-** or **u$_3$-**
2. the ventive element **mu-**
3. the dative prefixes (see 5.2.1) (always including a pronoun)
4. a dimensional prefix (see 4.2.3) with an optional pronoun
5. core prefixes resuming ergative (see 2.2.4) and locative-terminative (see 6.2.1)
6. the verbal stem
7. stem reduplication
8. endings expressing e.g. object pronouns

However, not all combinations of elements are possible, a number of restrictions apply.

A.2.2 Mutually exclusive elements

1. A verbal chain may feature only one model prefix, in particular a verb using a modal prefix cannot be negated as the negation **nu-** also is a modal prefix
2. A verbal chain may only have one of the dimensional case markers **-da, -ši** or **-ta** even if other dimensional cases appear previously in the sentence

A.2.3 Restrictions on starting the chain

1. Dative, dimensional, ergative and locative-terminative pronouns may *in principle* start a verbal chain but this is not permitted for all elements. **ma-an-g̃ar** 'he placed it for me' is permitted, ***ra-an-g̃ar* 'he placed it for you' is not.
2. If a pronoun is at the head of the chain that is not permitted to start it, a modal prefix or the ventive element can rectify the situation, **nu-ra-an-g̃ar** 'he didn't place it for you' is grammatical.

3. If neither ventive element nor modal prefix come before a pronoun that isn't permitted, the vowel $\mathbf{i}_3$**-** needs to be inserted, $\mathbf{i}_3$**-ra-an-g̃ar** 'he placed it for you' is grammatical.
4. If **mu-** appears as part of the locative-terminative paradigm, it may only be preceded by a modal prefix, ***i*$_3$*-ra-mu-un-g̃ar* 'he placed it for you next to me' is not permitted, **nu-mu-un-g̃ar** 'he did not place it for me' is.
5. If locative **bi**$_2$**-** 'there' is used, it may only be preceded by a modal prefix or the ventive element, ***ma-bi*$_2$*-in-g̃ar* 'he placed it there for me' is not permitted
6. If **ba-** is used as a general impersonal cunjugation prefix, it may not be repeated in the dative paradihgm
7. If no pronoun or nuance is to be used at all, stative **al-** has to be used before the verbal root. Only **nu-** may precede this element, no other elements may be used.

See appendix B for various verbal conjugation paradigms.

A.2.4 The imperative

The imperative is a transformation that reverses the verbal chain. This transformation has the rank of a modal prefix, thus it may not be combined with e.g. a negation **nu-**.

In the reversed verbal chain, $\mathbf{i}_3$ is usually changed to **-a**. Simple endings **-b** 'it' or **-n** 'him/her' can be attached such as **g̃ar-ra-ab** 'place it!'

Appendix B

VERBAL PARADIGMS

No conjugation prefix, object pronoun varies:

i_3-zal-le-en	I passed time
i_3-zal-le-en	you passed time
i_3-zal	he passed time
i_3-zal-le-en-de_3-en	we passed time
i_3-zal-le-en-ze_2-en	you (pl.) passed time
i_3-zal-le-eš	they passed time

ba- as prefix, plural stem change, object pronoun varies:

ba-ẽen-ne-en	I went
ba-ẽen-ne-en	you went
ba-ẽen	he went
ba-re_7-en-de_3-en	we went
ba-re_7-en-ze_2-en	you (pl.) went
ba-re_7-eš	they went

No conjugation prefix, ergative pronoun varies:

i_3-ẽar	I placed it
e-ẽar	you placed it
in-ẽar	he placed it
ib_2-ẽar	they (coll.) placed it
in-ẽar-eš	they placed it

Ventive element as prefix, ergative pronoun varies:

mu-g̃ar	I placed it
mu-e-g̃ar	you placed it
mu-un-g̃ar	he placed it
mu-ub-g̃ar	they (coll.) placed it
mu-un-g̃ar-eš	they placed it

No conjugation prefix, dative pronoun varies, 1st pl. is hypothetical:

ma-e-a_5	you did it for me
i_3-ra-e-a_5	you did it for you
i_3-na-e-a_5	you did it for him
ba-e-a_5	you did it for them
*me-e-a_5	you did it for us
i_3-ne-en-a_5	you did it for them

No conjugation prefix, comitative pronoun varies:

mu-da-an-gub	he stood with me
e-da-an-gub	he stood with you
in-da-an-gub	he stood with him
ib_2-da-an-gub	he stood with them
i_3-ne-da-an-gub	he stood with them

No conjugation prefix, loc.term. and ergative pronoun vary:

mu-g̃ar	I placed it next to me
i_3-ri-g̃ar	I placed it next to you
i_3-ni-g̃ar	I placed it next to him
bi_2-g̃ar	I placed it next to them

mu-e-g̃ar	you placed it next to me
i_3-ri-e-g̃ar	you placed it next to you
i_3-ni-g̃ar	you placed it next to him
bi_2-g̃ar	you placed it next to them

mu-un-g̃ar	he placed it next to me
i_3-ri-in-g̃ar	he placed it next to you
i_3-ni-in-g̃ar	he placed it next to him
bi_2-in-g̃ar	he placed it next to them

mu-ub-g̃ar	they placed it next to me
i_3-ri-ib_2-g̃ar	they placed it next to you
i_3-ni-ib_2-g̃ar	they placed it next to him
bi_2-ib_2-g̃ar	they placed it next to them

Verb in **maru**, subject pronoun varies:

mu-du$_3$-en	I shall build
mu-du$_3$-en	you shall build
mu-du$_3$-e	he shall build
mu-du$_3$-e-en-de$_3$-en	we shall build
mu-du$_3$-e-en-ze$_2$-en	you shall build
mu-du$_3$-e-ne	they shall build

Reduplication class verb in **maru**, subject pronoun varies:

mu-ub-zu-zu-en	I shall know it
mu-ub-zu-zu-en	you shall know it
mu-ub-zu-zu	he shall know it
mu-ub-zu-zu-en-de$_3$-en	we shall know it
mu-ub-zu-zu-en-ze$_2$-en	we shall know it
mu-ub-zu-zu-ne	they shall know it

Appendix C

LIST OF IRREGULAR VERBS

(note that several of the forms are not well attested and may be under debate)

C.1 MARU REDUPLICATION

Verbs in this class form the **maru**-stem by doubling the root. Quit usually the final consonant of the root is dropped in the process, but in some verbs it might be retained — occasionally it isn't even dropped.

ḫamtu	meaning	maru
bi-ir	to scatter	bi-ib-re
bi-iz	to drip	bi-bi-ze_2
e_{11}	to ascend, descend	e_3-de_3
gi_4	to return	gi_4-gi_4
gul	to destroy	gul-gul
ĝar	to place	ĝa_2-ĝa_2
ḫal	to stream	ḫal-ḫa
naĝ	to drink	na_8-na_8
$šam_2$	to buy	sa_{10}-sa_{10}
$raḫ_2$	to beat	ra-ra
$ša_6$(g)	to be good	$ša_6ša_6$
$taka_4$	to abandon	ta_6-ta_6
ten	to trample	te-en-te
tuku	to have a claim	tuk-tuk
zig_3	to rise	zi-zi
zu	to know, teach	zu-zu

C.2 MARU REDUPLICATION IN PLURAL

The verb **pad**$_3$ 'to find' shows a regular **maru** in singular, but doubles the root in **maru** plural:

'to find'	ḫamtu	maru
sg.	pad$_3$	pad$_3$-de$_3$
pl.	pad$_3$	pa$_3$-pa$_3$-de$_3$

C.3 STEM CHANGE IN PLURAL

Verbs of this class have distinct stems in singular and plural but form **maru** regularly (i.e. by appending **-e**).

singular	meaning	plural
ti(l)	to live (human)	sig$_7$, also se$_{12}$, si$_{12}$
lu(g)	to live (animal)	sig$_7$
gub	to stand	sug$_8$(g), also šu$_4$(g)
tuš	to sit	durun

C.4 STEM CHANGE IN MARU

Verbs of this class show unusual **maru** (i.e. formed neither by reduplication nor by reduplication) but no separate plural stems:

ḫamtu	meaning	maru
šum	to give	sum-mu
ri	to throw, cast	ri-ge
te	to approach	te-g̃e
kuš$_2$	to be tired	kuš$_2$-u$_3$

C.5 STEM CHANGE IN MARU AND PLURAL

Verbs in this class change the stem both in **maru** and plural in unpredictable ways.

'to speak'	ḫamtu	maru
sg.	du$_{11}$	e
pl.	e	e

'to bring'	ḫamtu	maru
sg.	de$_6$	tum$_2$, tum$_3$
pl.	laḫ$_4$	laḫ$_4$

'to go'	ḫamtu	maru
sg.	g̃en	du
pl.	re$_7$	su$_6$-be

'to die'	ḫamtu	maru
sg.	uš$_2$	ug$_5$, ug$_7$
pl.	ug$_5$, ug$_7$	ug$_5$, ug$_7$

Appendix D

INFLECTION OF PRONOUNS

Case endings appended to possessive pronouns show some exceptions to the usual rules of phonology. The following tables summarize the possible outcomes in writing:

	object	ergative **-e**	dative **-ra**	terminative **-še**$_3$
1st	-g̃u$_{10}$	-g̃u$_{10}$	-g̃u$_{10}$-ra / -g̃u$_{10}$-ur	-g̃u$_{10}$-še$_3$ / g̃u$_{10}$-uš
2nd	-zu	-zu	-zu-ra / -zu-ur	-zu-še$_3$ / -zu-uš
3rd	-(a)-ni	-(a)-ne$_2$	-(a)-ni-ra / -(a)-ni-ir	-(a)-ni-še$_3$ / -(a)-ni-iš
3i	-bi	-be$_2$	-bi-ra / -bi-ir	-bi-še$_3$ / -bi-iš
1st	-me	-me	-me-ra	-me-še$_3$
2nd	-zu-ne-ne	-zu-ne-ne	-zu-ne-ne-ra	-zu-ne-ne-še$_3$
3rd	-(a)-ne-ne	-(a)-ne-ne	-(a)-ne-ne-ra / -(a)-ne-ne-er	-(a)-ne-ne-še$_3$

	genitive **-ak**	locative **-a**	ablative **-ta**	plural **-(e)ne**
1st	-g̃a$_2$	-g̃a$_2$	g̃u$_{10}$-ta	g̃u$_{10}$-ne
2nd	-za	-za	-zu-ta	-zu-ne
3rd	-(a)-na	-(a)-na	-(a)-ni-ta	-(a)-ne$_2$-ne
3i	-ba	-ba	-bi-ta	-be$_2$-ne
1st	-me	-me-a	-me-ta	?
2nd	-zu-ne-ne	-zu-ne-ne-a	-zu-ne-ne-ta	?
3rd	-(a)-ne-ne	-(a)-ne-ne-a	-(a)-ne-ne-ta	?

The set of independent pronouns inflects as follows:

	object/ ergative	dative	ablative
1st	ɡ̃a$_2$-e	ɡ̃a$_2$-ra / ɡ̃a$_2$-ar	ɡ̃a$_2$-ta
2nd	za-e	za-ra / za-ar	za-ta
3rd	a-ne	e-ne-ra / e-ne-er	e-ne-ta
1st	me-en-de$_2$-en	—	—
2nd	me-en-ze$_2$-en	—	—
3rd	e-ne-ne	e-ne-ne-ra / e-ne-ne-er	e-ne-ne-ta

Appendix E

KEYS TO PRACTICE EXERCISES

Note that often answers aren't unique — different conjugation prefixes are possible, resuming in the verba; chain is optional, sometimes there are different ways of expressing the same idea — so take the answers here as a hint to guide understanding, not as unique truth.

LESSON 2

Exercises of page 34:

Exercise 1:

a) a man like a king b) this woman is the wife of the king c) a sheep of the scribe d) this small wall e) strength like the power of a god f) all the walls of the city g) the street is broad

Exercise 2:

a) Ur-^{d}Iškur dub-sar-am$_3$ b) iri sa$_6$-ga-am$_3$ c) erin$_2$-e bad$_3$ mu-ub-du$_3$ d) aga$_3$-uš$_2$-e bad$_3$ mu-un-du$_3$ e) bad$_3$ ba-du$_3$ f) ba-si g) lu$_2$-be$_2$ dub-sar mu-un-uš$_2$ h) šeš tur lugal-la i) bad$_3$ gal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma

Exercise 3:

a) dam-ma b) nin-na c) nita d) uri$_5^{ki}$-ma e) ensi$_2$-ka f) šeš tur-ra g) nin-ba h) eden dağal-la i) dumu lugal-la-ka j) dam dub-sar-ra-ka

LESSON 3

Exercises of page 46:

Exercise 1: a) the reign of the king b) the god decreed fate from the temple c) he took the clay tablet away d) he brought the clay tablet e) the king established Ur-Iškur as a scribe

Exercise 2: dub-sar-še$_3$ b) eden gal-bi-ta c) dam-a-ni-da in-da-an-gub d) kur-še$_3$ igi mu-ub-ši-in-bar e) erin$_2$ uri$_5^{ki}$-ma-ke$_4$ šu mu-ub-il$_2$ f) nita munus-bi-da g) me-ta h) pa$_3$-de$_3$-en

(note that resuming — here shown in full — is optional, so e.g. **kur-še$_3$ igi mu-un-bar** would also be entirely valid for d))

Exercise 3: a) iri e$_2$-bi b) dub-sar-ra dumu-ni c) udu mu-bi d) ša$_3$ zi-da gu$_3$-bi

Exercise 4: a) ba-ab-ta-an-g̃en b) ba-an-da-an-gub c) *this can either be* mu-un-da-an-de$_6$ *or* mu-un-ši-in-de$_6$ d) mu-ub-ši-in-bar

Exercise 5: a) u$_4$-bi-ta ba-gub-be$_2$-en b) id$_2$ dag̃al-še$_3$ im-ši-g̃en-ne-en c) nin-gin$_7$ ba-sa$_6$-ge-en

LESSON 4

Exercises of page 56:

Exercise 1: a) my friend b) your mouth c) their affair d) I am king e) the young brother of my king f) my heart rejoices g) I have great things h) you did not place it

Exercise 2: a) iri-g̃u$_{10}$ b) ensi$_2$-ka-ne-ne c) nig̃$_2$-ba-ni d) šu-zu e-luh̲ e) igi igi dam-g̃a$_2$ f) nig̃$_2$-ba mu-gi$_4$

Exercise 3: a) nu-mu-da-an-gub b) dumu dub-sar-ra nu-am$_3$ c) lugal-e e$_2$ nu-un-du$_3$ d) igi nu-mu-ši-e-bar e) šu-ni nu-un-luh̲ f) la-ba-an-da-gub-be$_2$-en

LESSON 5

Exercises of page 68:

Exercise 1: a) the gift that has been given *or* give the gift! b) he gives grain to you c) stand before the eldest son of the king! d) take it! e) look at him/her f) is there cold wine? g) the woman to whom I gave beer h) take it from the oven and put it into the mouth

Exercise 2: a) luh̲-h̲a b) eden gal-še$_3$ g̃en-na c) dub-sar-ra še šum-ma d) šakanka-ta kaš de$_6$-a e) mu sar-ra f) sila$_4$ dab$_5$-ba g) ma-e-šum

Exercise 3: a) šeg̃-g̃a-an b) nag̃-g̃a-ab c) du$_3$-a-an d) igi bar-ra e) šu il$_2$-la

LESSON 6

Exercises of page 82:

Exercise 1: a) the Išib-priest entered the city b) make him stand in the courtyard c) a pot full of honey was brought to the market d) he placed it next to you e) you stood next to me f) he built the temple of the god there g) these ladies

Exercise 2: e_2-a im-ĝen-ne-en b) ugula-e il_2-ra lipiš-bi igi mu-na-an-bar c) an lugal diĝir-re-ne d) lugal gal-le-ne e) bi_2-in-ĝar f) bi_2-sar

Exercise 3: a) dub-sar-re-ne b) dumu tur-re-ne c) maškim-me-ne d) kur kur e) il_2 f) ugula-ne g) bad_3 gal gal

LESSON 7

Exercises of page 94:

Exercise 1: a) until I/you will return b) I will raise my hand c) he will slaughter an ox d) I/you shall learn wisdom e) he will be chosen by Enlil

Exercise 2: a) kaš u_3-mu-e-de_6 mu-ub-na_8-na_8-an b) iri-bi mu-ub-gul-gul-le-en c) dug $\underline{h}e_2$-pad-de_2-en d) lu_2 udu gaz-e e) šu an-$še_3$ ga-mu-il_2 f) u_3 ba-$uš_2$-še-en mu-zu-zu.

Exercise 3: e_2 ba-du_3-e b) kaš mu-ub-na_8-na_8 c) bi_2-ĝa_2-ĝa_2-an d) niĝ$_2$ ki aĝ$_2$-ge e) ba-zal-le f) inim-bi mu-e

Exercise 4: a) pad-da b) gaz-ze c) zalag d) $\underline{h}$ul-$\underline{h}$ul-le e) ki-aĝ$_2$

Exercise 5: a) he drank his own beer b) I wrote this word by my own free will c) Look for yourself! d) by yourself you shall pass time e) I saw myself

LESSON 8

Exercises of page 105:

Exercise 1: a) The king who dedicated the statue died. b) Because Ur-Nammu is a scribe, he is rich. c) When Ur-Nammu built the temple of Enlil, his son was born. d) You cannot give it to me. e) The gods rejoiced. f) He was able to create the statue. g) Because of that, he will go away. h) Because his seed is cursed, he must not have a son.

Exercise 2: a) nam en-lil_2-le a_2 ma-an-$šum_2$-ma-ke_4-eš dili nu-me-en. b) ugula lu_2 il_2-ra gu_3 in-ra$\underline{h}$-a ba-ta-ĝen c) u_4-bi-ta lugal-$še_3$ ba-pad_3-da Ur-^{d}Nammu nita kala-ga-am_3 d) ba-ra-ab-zu-zu-un e) nam-zu ba-ra-e-kur_2 f) nam-ĝu_{10} mu-da-kur_2 g) ki bad_3 ba-gul-la-a bi_2-gub-be_2-en

Appendix F

KEYS TO CUNEIFORM EXERCISES

Exercise 2.6.6 (page 38) :

Transliteration:

mu šul-gi lugal
mu e_2-ḫur-saĝ ba-du_3
mu e_2-an-na ba-du_3
mu bad_3 uri_5^{ki}-ma ba-du_3
mu ur-^{d}nammu lugal-e bad_3 mu-du_3

Translation:

year in which Shulgi became king
year in which Ehursag ('house of the mountain') was built
year in which Eanna ('house of heaven') was built
year in which the wall of Ur was built
year in which Ur-Nammu the king built the wall

Exercise 3.6.5 (page 49) :

Transliteration:

^{d}Nanna
lugal-a-ni
Ur-^{d}Nammu
lugal uri_5^{ki}-ma-ke
e_2-a-ni
mu-na-du_3
bad_3 uri_5^{ki}-ma
mu-na-du_3

Translation:

For Nanna
his king
Ur-Nammu
king of Ur
his house
did he build for him
the wall of Ur
did he build for him

Exercise 4.6.5 (page 59) :

Transliteration:

^{d}nin-ĝir$_2$-su
ur-saĝ kala-ga
^{d}en-lil-la$_2$-ra
gu$_3$-de$_2$-a
ensi$_2$
lagaš^{ki}
niĝ$_2$-ul-e pa mu-na-e$_3$
e$_2$-ninnu ^{d}anzu^{musen}babbar-ra-ni
mu-na-du$_3$
ki-bi mu-na-gi$_4$

Translation:

For Ningirsu
mighty hero
of Enlil
Gudea
governor
of Lagaš
made cultic things shine
his E-Ninnu of the shining Anzu-bird
he built for him
and restored to its proper place

Exercise 5.6.3 (page 70) :

Transliteration:

An lugal diĝir-re-ne
lugal-a-ni
Ur-^{d}Nammu
lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma-ke
^{gis}kiri$_6$ maḫ
mu-na-gub
bara$_2$ ki sikil-la
mu-na-du$_3$

Translation:

For An, king of the gods
his king
Ur-Nammu
king of Ur
a magnificient garden

did he establish
an altar in a pure place
did he build

Exercise 6.6.4 (page 85):

Transliteration:

ia ma-na gi-na
^{d}šu ^{d}en-su
lugal kalag-ga
lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma
lugal an-ub-da-limmu$_2$-ba

Translation:

five certified mina
(by) Shu-Suen
the mighty king
the king of Ur
the king of the four corners

Exercise 7.6.5 (page 97):

Transliteration:

^{d}en-lil$_2$-le ḫe$_2$-ḫa-lam-me
^{d}nin-g̃ir$_2$-su-ke$_4$ sa šuš gal-ni u$_3$-ne$_2$-šuš
šu maḫ g̃iri$_3$ maḫ-ni an-ta ḫe-g̃a$_2$-g̃a$_2$
nam-lu$_2$-lu$_7$ iri-na šu u$_3$-ne$_6$-zi
ša$_3$ iri-na-ka ha-ne$_2$-gaz-e

Translation:

May Enlil destroy (them)!
May Ningirsu, when he has enveloped them in his great catching net
set his mighty hand and mighty foot from heaven (upon them)
when the population of his city raises hands against them,
may he slay them in the heart of his city!

Exercise 8.6.3 (page 107):

Transliteration:

^{d}amar ^{d}en-zu
nibru^{ki}-a
^{d}en-lil$_2$-le
mu-pad$_3$-da
sag̃-us$_2$
e$_2$ en-lil$_2$-ka
lugal kala-ga
lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma
lugal an-ub-da-limmu-ba-me(-en)
alan-ba
^{d}amar ^{d}en-zu ki-ag̃$_2$ uri$_5^{ki}$-ma
mu-bi-im
alan-ba
lu$_2$ ki gub-ba-bi
ib-da-ab-kur$_2$-re-a
bara$_2$ si-ga-bi

i$_3$-bu$_3$-re-a
^{d}Nanna
lugal uri$_5^{ki}$-ma-ke$_4$
^{d}Nin-Gal
ama uri$_5^{ki}$-ma-ke$_4$
nam ḫa-ba-an-da-kur$_5$-ne
numun-na-ni
ḫe$_2$-eb-til-le-ne

Translation:

Amar-Sin
in Nippur
by Enlil
chosen
supporter
of the temple of Enlil
mighty king
king of Ur
king of the four corners
of this statue
Amar-Sin beloved by Ur
its name is
of this statue
anyone who its standing place
will change
its pedestal
will destroy
Nanna
king of Ur
Ningal
mother of Ur
they shall curse him
his offspring
they shall end

Appendix G

CUNEIFORM NAMES

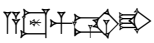
Divine names

	Inanna		Nanna		Enlil
	Enki		Ningal		Nammu
	Nanše		Ningirsu		Ninhursaĝ
	Bau		Dumuzi		Lugalbanda
	Marduk		Gilgameš		Ereškigal
	Utu		Šara		Ninĝišzida

Cities

	Nippur		Lagaš		Babylon
	Eridu		Ur		Uruk/Erech
	Larsa		Umma		Sippar

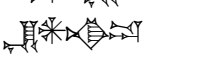
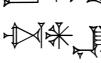
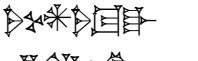
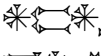
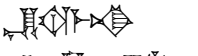
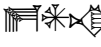
Rivers

	Euphrates		Tigris

Temples

	Eanna		Ekur		Etemeniguru
	Ehursaĝ		Eninnu		Eabzu

Personal names

	Ur-Nammu		Gudea
	Šulgi		Šu-Sin
	Ur-Nanše		Enanatum
	Warad-Sin		Hamurabi
	Ur-Iškur		Utu-Hegal
	Lu-Šara		Bau-Alsa
	Ur-Enki		Geme-Ningal
	Amar-Sin		Entemena
	Eanatum		Tirigan
	Geme-Bau		Mešanepada

Appendix H

VOCABULARY SUMERIAN-ENGLISH

A

a$_2$ *arm, strength*
a$_5$(k) *to do, make*
a-ab-ba *ocean, sea*
a$_2$ — ağ$_2$ *to command*
a-ba *who?*
^{gis}ad *log, raft*
aga$_3$-us$_2$ *soldier*
ah̲$_3$ *to dry*
alan *statue*
al-dug$_4$ *desire*
amar *calf*
an *heaven*
a-na-aš *why?*
anše *donkey*
an-ub-da *corner*
a — ru *to dedicate*
a$_2$-tah̲ *helper*

B

ba *to allot*
bad$_3$ *wall*
bala *reign, term of office*
banšur *table*
bara$_2$ *dais, altar*
bara$_2$ si-ga *pedestal*
bu$_3$-ra *to cut, destroy*

D

dab$_5$ *to take, accept, seize*
dağal *wide*
dam *spouse*
dam-gar$_3$ *merchant*
de$_2$ *to pour out*
de$_6$ *to carry, bring*
dili *single, alone*
dim$_2$ *to create, make*
diğir *god*
diri *to float*
du$_3$ *to build*
du$_{11}$ *to say, speak*
du$_{12}$ *music*
du$_{12}$ *to marry*
dub *clay tablet*
dub-sar *scribe*
dug *pot, jar*
dumu *son, child, citizen*

E

e$_2$ *house, temple*
e$_2$-dub-ba *school*
e$_2$-gal *palace*
e$_3$ *to exit, go out*
eden *steppe, plain*
en-na *until*
ensi$_2$(k) *governor*
er$_2$ *tears*
^{gis}eren *cedar*
erin$_2$ *troops, workers (coll.)*
e-sir$_2$ *street*
eš$_3$ *shrine*

G

gal *great*
gaz *to kill, slaughter*
gi$_4$ *to return, restore*
gibil *new*
gi-dub-ba *stylus*
gig *painful, bad*
gin$_6$ *to make firm*
gi-na *certified*
gir$_4$ *oven*
gub *to stand*
gu$_2$ *neck, riverbank*
gu$_3$ *voice*
gu$_3$ — ra$\underline{\text{h}}_3$ *to shout*
gu$_3$ — de$_2$ *to speak*
gu$_7$ *to eat*
gud *ox*
gul *to destroy*

G̃

g̃al$_2$ *to be, exist*
g̃ar *to establish, place*
ĝen *to go*
g̃eštin *wine*
g̃eštug *wisdom*
g̃i$_6$ *night*
g̃iri$_3$ *foot*
g̃iš-nud *bed*

$\underline{\text{H}}$

$\underline{\text{h}}$a-lam *to forsake, destroy*
$\underline{\text{h}}$e$_2$-g̃al$_2$ *plenty*
$\underline{\text{h}}$ul$_2$ *to rejoice*
$\underline{\text{h}}$um *to be in motion*
$\underline{\text{h}}$ur-saĝ *mountain*

I

i$_7$ *river*
id$_2$ *river*
igi *eye*
igi — bar *to look at*
il$_2$ *porter*
inim *word, matter, affair*
išib *priest (possibly exorcist)*
itud *moon*

K

ka *mouth*
ka$_2$ *gate*
kala(g) *mighty*
kar *quay, harbour*
kaskal *road*
kaš *beer*
ki — aĝ$_2$ *to love*
kid$_7$ *to cut, fell*
ki-en-gi(r) *Sumer*
^{gis}kiri$_6$ *garden, orchard*
kisal *courtyard*
ki-uri *Akkad*
ku$_4$(r) *to enter*
ku$_3$-babbar *silver*
ku-li *friend*
kur *hill*
kur$_2$ *to change*

L

lal$_3$ *honey*
lipiš *anger*
lu$_2$ *person, someone*
lu$\underline{\text{h}}$ *to wash*

M

ma-da *land*
ma$_2$-gur$_8$ *barge*
ma$\underline{\text{h}}$ *magnificient*
malba *price*
ma-mu$_2$(d) *dream*

maškim *administrator*
me *divine power*
mu *text, year, name*
mul *star*
munus *woman*

N

nam *fate*
nam — kur_5 *to curse*
nam-lugal *kingship*
nam-lu_2-lu_7 *population, humanity*
nam — tar *to decree a fate*
naĝ *to drink*
nar *musician*
ne-ha *peaceful*
ni_2 *self*
$niĝ_2$ *thing, something*
$niĝ_2$-ba *gift*
$niĝ_2$-dug_3 *a good thing*
$niĝ_2$-gu_7 *food*
nin *lady*
nita *male, man*
numun *seed, offspring*

P

pad *to smash, break into bits*
pa_3(d) *to find, swear propose*
pa — e_3 *to cause to appear*

S

sa *net*
sa_6(g) *to be good, beautiful*
saĝ *head*
saĝ-ku_3-$ĝal_2$ *proud*
saĝ-$uš_2$ *supporter, patron*
sal *thin, fine*
sar *to write*
sed *to be cold*
si *to fill*
sikil *pure*
$sila_4$ *lamb*
silim *peace*
sur-ra *boundary*

Š

$ša_3$ *heart*
$šam_2$ *to buy*
$ša_3$ – pad_3 *to propose, choose*
šakanka *market*
še *grain*
šeĝ *to roast, cook*
šeš *brother*
šu *hand*
šu — il_2 *to raise hands, pray*
šuš *to cover, envelop*
šu — ti *to receive*
šu — zi *to do violence*
$šum_2$ *to give*

T

tar *to decree, decide, cut*
teš *unity*
til *to live*
tuku *to have, to possess*
^{gis}tukul *weapon, mace*
tum_2 *to bring, lead to*
tun_3 *axe*
tur *small, young*
tur_3 *stall*

U

u_3 *sleep*
u_4 *day*
u_2-a *nourisher*
udu *sheep*
ugula *foreman*
$uĝ_3$ *people*
ul_4 *to hurry*
ur *dog, wolf, 'warrior'*
uri_5^{ki}(m) *Ur (city)*
uruda *copper*
usar *(female) neighbor*
$uš_2$ *to die*

Z

zal *to pass time*
zalag *to shine*
zi(d) *true, right, to be right*
zu *to know, learn*