

An introduction to Sumerian Cuneiforms

Eduardo Costa

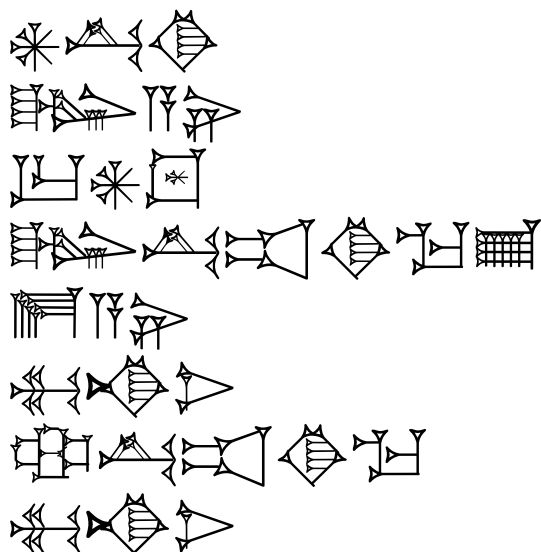
Marcus Santos

Sergio Teixeira

Chapter 1

Ur-Nammu-9

The Sumerian cuneiform script was the first writing system invented by humankind. Therefore, all educated individuals should learn this 5,000-year-old script. In this tutorial, we will learn how to read and reproduce the writing on the Ur-Nammu 9 Brick.



There are few grammar books for Sumerian. Unfortunately, Marie-Louise Thomsen's "**The Sumerian Language**" does not use cuneiform, so I cannot recommend it. This leaves us with John Hayes' Manual of Sumerian and Joshua Bowen's Learn to Read Ancient Sumerian. Therefore, I advise you to buy "**A Manual of Sumerian: Grammar and Texts**" by Hayes to learn this ancient language in depth. It is also a good idea to acquire "**Learn to Read Ancient Sumerian**" by Joshua Bowen and Megan Lewis.

1.1 Disclaimer

The authors of this book are not a scholars in Sumerian studies in any sense. Therefore, they may not help serious students of cuneiforms to solve their pendencies and questions.

For scholars and graduate students who are writing their thesis, the authors recommend John Hayes' **Manual of Sumerian** and Joshua Bowen's **Learn to Read Ancient Sumerian**. Hayes' manual strong points are inscriptions and dedicatories, while Bowen and Lewis prefer literary texts.

1.2 Sentence structure

To discuss grammar, scholars use a transliteration of Sumerian cuneiforms to the Latin alphabet. Below, you will find the transliteration of the Ur-Nammu-9 document that we will study in this lesson.




```

1- [nanna
2-     lugal.ani].{(r)} #dat           -- For his king
3- [ur-nammu                               -- Ur-Nammu,
4-     lugal.urim.{ak}].{e} #gen/erg  -- the king of UR,
5- [e2.ani].{} #object                -- his temple
6- mu.na.du3 #verb                    -- he built
7- [bad3.urim5.{a(k)}].{} #gen/obj    -- the city wall of Ur
8- mu.na.du3 #verb                    -- he built

```

1.3 Grammar functions in transliteration

In the transliteration, grammar functions are represented by indicators between braces. In the example, the grammar functions are:

- 1,2 The benefactive has an unwritten “(r)”, which is represented by {(r)}
- 3,4 The genitive ends in {ak} after consonant; the ergative ends in {e}
- 5 The object of the action has no ending, which is represented by {}
- 7 The genitive has an unwritten “(k)”, which is represented by {a(k)}
- 8 The verbal chain  (tr mu na du3) starts with the ventive prefix , followed by a cross-reference  (tr na) to the dative.

Square brackets delimit a noun chain, i.e., a noun followed by a sequence of limiting qualifiers that may contain adjectives, apositives and a genitive. Example: [ur-nammu lugal.urim5.{ak}].{e} means

[Ur-Nammu, Ur's king].{task-doer}

After the close square bracket, a braced symbol suffix indicates the function of the noun chain. For instance, .{e} shows that [ur.nammu...].{e} is the doer of the sentence's task. The {(r)} symbol shows that [nanna...].{(r)} receives the benefits of the task: [God Nanna].{benefactive}.

The noun chain may contain a genitive, as was stated in the previous paragraph. If you don't know the role of a genitive, it is a grammar function that shows possession. In English, the Saxon genitive marks the possessor with apostrophe-s and comes before the noun: *Ur's king*. In Sumerian, the possessor follows the noun and is marked with {ak} after consonant and {k} after vowel: {urim5 ma}.{k} is equivalent to *Ur's king*.

Braces represent the grammatical function endings. For instance, the ergative function-ending represents the doer of the task and is written as {e} #erg, where #erg is a comment that will be omitted in more advanced lessons. The person who receives the benefit of the action is called dative and is represented as {ra} #dat, where the #dat comment is usually omitted.



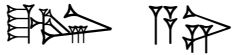
The empty ending of the object is commented as {Ø} #obj or simply as {} #obj. In the example, the objects are the constructions of king Ur-Nammu:




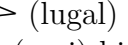

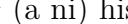
[e2 a ni].{} -- his temple
 [[bad3.urim5].{a(k)}].{} -- the city wall of Ur

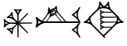

Unwritten endings are placed between parentheses, such as {(r)}.


1.4 Line 1 & 2

The Ur-Nammu 9 document is divided into eight lines.

		
^d nanna	lugal	a ni
(tr an nanna lugal a ni)		
<i>For the god Nanna, his master,</i>		

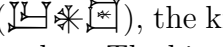

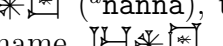
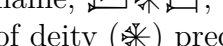

		(^d nanna) the god Nanna
		(lugal) king, master
		(a ni) his






In the first line, the text  is written, which is the Sumerogram for the name of Nanna, the god of the Moon. The  symbol is read as **an** (or **digir**) and is determinative for deity. We will learn in the next paragraph that this word is in the dative case; therefore, the translation of the rectangle is “*For Nanna.*”

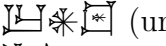
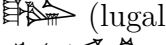
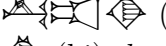
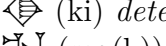
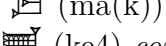

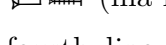
Sumerian uses symbols, called determinatives, to make the meaning clearer. The star  in front of a god’s name is the determinative of divinity. In transliteration, the determinatives are represented as a superscript letter, such as ^dnanna.



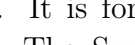


The Emacs command (tr an nanna lugal a ni) is used to typeset Sumerian. There are instructions about this command on the page where you found this tutorial.

1.5 Line 3 & 4

The third line of the Ur-Nammu-9 document contains the name of Ur-Nammu () , the king who rebuilt the temple of ^dNanna and is the document’s author. The king’s name is formed by  (ur), which means *man* or *dog*, and  (^dnanna), the Mother Earth of the Sumerians. Therefore, the king’s name, , means “*The Man of Nammu.*” Note that the determinative of deity () precedes the goddess’ name.

				
ur- ^d nammu	lugal	urim	ma	ke4
(tr ur nammu lugal urim ma ke4)				
<i>Ur-Nammu, the king of Ur,</i>				

 (ur-^dnammu) King Ur-Nammu
 (lugal) king, master
 (urim^{ki}) the city of Ur
 (ki) *determinative of places*
 (ma(k)) *dative after the consonant “M”*
 (ke4) *contraction of dative with ergative*
 (ma ke4) *genitive contracted with ergative*

The fourth line contains  (tr lugal urim2 ma ke4), where  (tr urim) represents the city that was the cult center of Nanna. It is formed by the Sumerograms (tr shesh) () and (tr unug) (). The Sumerogram  is the determinative for geographic names.

Determinatives, such as ✳️ (“digir” - deity) and 🏠 (“ki” - place), are not pronounced. Their role is to make the meaning of the word clearer.

The genitive case denotes possession. Unlike the dative, English has a genitive case, formed by an apostrophe followed by “s.” In English, one would say, “**Urim’s King.**” In Sumerian, the genitive follows the possessor and is marked with {ak} after consonants and {k} after vowels. In this nominal chain, the “a” of {ak} was assimilated with the previous consonant, becoming 🏠 (ma). The Sumerogram 🏠 (ke4) represents the {k} of the genitive and the {e} of the ergative.

Sumerian is an ergative language, meaning the agent of transitive actions is marked. In Sumerian, the ergative marker is {e}. However, the subject of an intransitive verb, like “to go” or “to sleep,” does not receive the {e} that marks the agent, whom linguists call ergative. Unmarked functions, such as the Sumerian subject of an intransitive verb and direct object of a transitive verb, are called absolutive and said to be marked with the null symbol {}. In short, for the Sumerians and modern Basques, if the subject of a sentence does not perform a task, it cannot be called ergative.

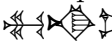
1.6 Line 5




The fifth rectangle introduces the temple (e2 - 🏠) that Ur-Nammu built. The expression 🏠🏠🏠 (e2 ani) means “*his temple*.” It is in the absolutive case and, therefore, receives the null symbol mark {}, a technical way of saying it does not bear a mark. The noun chain 🏠🏠🏠 (e2 ani) undergoes the consequences of the task performed. Thus, it is often called patient, accusative or target.




🏠	🏠	🏠
e2	a	ni
(tr e2 a ni)		
<i>his temple</i>		

🏠 (e2) house, temple
 🏠🏠🏠 (e2 me esh-pl) pl. houses, temples
 🏠🏠 (a ni) his


1.7 Line 6


A verbal stem prefixed by a sequence of particles and possibly followed by a suffix is called a *verbal chain*. The verbal chain  (mu-na-du3) can be translated as “*built*.”


  
 mu na du3
 (tr mu na du3)
he has built for the god

 (du3) to build, to make, to plant
 (mu) *conjugation prefix (CP), ventive prefix, here*
 (na) *cross-references the dative*





The verbal chain of the example has two prefixes and a stem:







Ventive Conjugation Prefix  (CP). The Ventive CP indicates that the action occurs here, close to the speaker.



Dimensional Prefix  (DP) cross-referencing the dative. Sumerian has a DP for each sentence component, except the ergative and the absolutive cases.

Verbal stem  *he has built*

1.8 Line 7 & 8

The noun phrase    (tr bad3 urim ma) means “*wall of Ur*.” The sumerogram  (tr bad3) means “*city wall*.” The {(k)} of the genitive is omitted, meaning it is not expressed because it was not pronounced at the end of a nominal phrase.

     
 bad3 urim ma mu na du3
 (tr bad3 urim ma mu na du3)
the city wall of Ur, he has built

 (ra) *dative ending*
 (na) *reference to dative*

1.9 Reading the brick

Let's read the whole brick inscription.

1. (tr an nanna) (𒀭𒂗𒍪) – *For the god Nanna...*
2. (tr lugal ani) (𒌦𒂗𒍪𒀭) – *his master*, // The word 'lugal' means king or master. It is formed from 'lu2,' (𒌦) which means 'man,' and 'gal,' (𒂗) which can be translated as 'great.' The expression 'a-ni' (𒀭𒀭) is equivalent to the possessive pronoun 'his.'
3. (tr ur-nammu) (𒌦𒀭𒍪) – *Ur-Nammu*,
4. (tr lugal urim ki ma ke4) (𒌦𒂗𒍪𒀭𒂗𒍪𒀭𒂗𒍪𒀭𒂗𒍪) – *the king of Ur*,
5. (tr e2 a ni) (𒂗𒀭𒀭) – *his temple*, // Remember that you already learned the meaning of 'a ni.'
6. (tr mu na du3) (𒄩𒂗𒍪𒀭) – *he has built*.
7. (tr bad3 urim ma) (𒂗𒀭𒀭𒀭𒀭𒀭) – *The wall of Ur*,
8. (tr mu na du3) (𒄩𒂗𒍪𒀭) – *he built for Nanna*.

1.10 Translation

The meaning of the whole document is something like this: *“For the god Nanna, his Master, Ur-Nammu, the King of Ur, built his temple. The king also built the city walls of Ur for Nanna.”*

1.11 The method

I will use the method I employed in this first chapter to introduce a few other documents. In other words, each chapter will contain grammar, vocabulary, syllables, and essential Sumerograms for reading a Sumerian document. This methodology ensures you can handle a manageable amount of information initially.

After discussing how to read a Sumerian inscription, each chapter contains an in-depth presentation of the Sumerian grammar. Initially, you can do without reading this final grammar section. You can return to it after practicing Sumerian with a few inscriptions.

1.12 APPENDIX 1: Grammar notes

Congratulations. You have finished the first lesson. This appendix gives further details about the case elements, the noun chain and the verbal chain. If you don't feel like it, you don't need to read it now. You can return to this lesson after completing a few Sumerian documents.

Case elements

The subject of a sentence is the topic of the conversation. Besides the subject, the sentence may have other marked components called case elements. Case elements may have references in the verbal chain. The leading case elements with their marks and references are:

Ergative: {e} task doer



(tr lugal e bad3 urim ma mu na du3)

The king built the city wall of Ur.

Dative: {ra} / (-na-) for



(tr nin a ni ra lugal e bad3 urim ma mu na du3)

The king built the wall of Ur for his lady.

Locative: {a} // (-ni-) in, on



(tr lugal e uru a e2 mu ni du3)

The king built a house in the city.

Terminative: {še} // (-ši-) in order to



(tr ge26 e uru gu10-my she-goal ga shi gen)

I will go there to my city.

Ablative: {ta} // (-ta-) or (-ra-) out of



(cn uru ta ba ta ĝen)

He went out from the city.

Comitative: {da} // (-da-) with



(tr lugal e dumu a ni da e2 mu un da du3)

The king built the house with his son.

Equitative: {gin} // (-gin-) like, as



(tr a ba shesh ĝu10-my gin-equitative)

Who is like my brother?

Absolutive: {∅} or {}



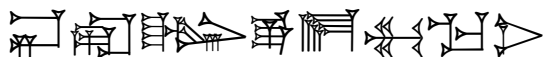
(tr nin a ni ra lugal e bad3 mu na du3)

For his lady, the king has built the city wall.

Dative conjugation

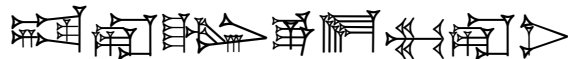
When used as a prefix to a verb, the dative takes different forms depending on the person and number it is referring to.

(-ma-) to me



(tr ĝe26 ra lugal e e2 mu ma du3)

The king built a house for me.

(-ra-) to you

(tr ze2 ra lugal e e2 mu ra du3)

The king has built a house for you.

(-na-) to him/to her

(tr nin ra lugal e e2 mu na du3)

The king has built a house for the lady.

(-me-) to us

(tr lugal e e2 mu me du3)

The king has built a house for us.

(-ne-) to them

(tr lugal e e2 mu ne du3)

The king has built a house for them.

Transitive verbs

A transitive verb describes an action that transitions from a subject to a direct object. In a transitive verb, the subject is the doer of the action and is called ergative, which is the Greek term for the person who performs a task. In Sumerian, the ergative is marked with {e}.

The absolutive case is the entity that undergoes the consequences of a task. The absolutive case can be the person accused of a deed. In this case, it is called accusative.

The absolutive case can also be a target of a shooting. Or it can be the object of health care, in which case it is called patient by the doctors.

Some linguists call *patient* all kinds of absolutive cases of a transitive verb, while others prefer the term accusative.

In Sumerian, the absolutive case receives no mark, but the linguists say it is marked by the null symbol { \emptyset }.

The transitive verb itself comes last in a Sumerian sentence, and is described by a chain of affixes surrounding the stem. This verbal chain may contain a Modal Prefix (MP, such as 𒀭 • nu • not), a Conjugation Prefix (CP, such as 𒄩 • mu • *ventive*, here), initial pronominal prefix (IPP, such as N in 𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩 • mu-n.dab.e • he seizes her) and suffix pronouns (𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭 • en-de3-en • us, 𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩 • un-ze2-en • you people). Below, there are examples of all initial pronominal prefixes.

Initial Pronominal Prefixes (IPP)

In the verbal chain, the Initial Pronominal Prefixes (IPP) come after the Conjugation Prefix (CP) that is 𒄩 (-mu-) in the examples below. The 𒄩 (-mu-) prefix is the *ventive*, i.e., it shows that the action is performed towards the speaker. English uses different verbs for the *andative* (motion away from the speaker) and the *ventive* (motion towards the speaker): *to take away* / *to bring*, *to go* / *to come*, etc. Sumerian gets the same effect by adding the *ventive* Conjugation Prefix (CP) to the verbal chain.

(tr mu dab e)

𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭

He seizes me.

(tr mu e dab e)

𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭

He seizes you.

(tr mu un dab e)

𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭

He seizes her.

(tr mu me dab e)

𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩

He seizes us.

(tr mu un ne dab e)

𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭𒄩𒀭

He seizes them.

I have for you a complete example of a transitive sentence below. I provide a pronunciation key and vocabulary, so I hope you can scan the sentence.

(tr munus ra lu2 e she uru a mu na ab shum2 e)

munus ra	lu2 e	she	uru a	mu na ab shum2 e
for the woman	the man	barley	in the city	he gave it to her

The translation of the sentence is: *The man gave barley to the woman in the city.* The person who receives the barley is marked with the dative {ra}; the doer of the action has the ergative marker {e}, and the place of the occurrence has the locative marker {a}.

• (munus) woman, female

• (ra) *dative marker*

• (lu2) man, male

• (e) *ergative marker*

• (še) barley, grain

• (uru) city

• (a) *locative marker*

• (mu) *venitive conjugation prefix, here*

• (na) *cross-reference to the dative, to her*

• (ab) *Initial Prefix Pronoun, it*

• (shum2) to give

Intransitive verb

An intransitive verb does not have a direct object. In Sumerian, the subject of an intransitive verb goes to the absolutive case and, therefore, is not marked.

(tr lu2 uru ĝu10-my she-goal i3 im ĝen)			
lu2	uru ĝu10 she-goal	i3 im	ĝen
the king	to my city	finite verb prefix	came

The translation of the above example is: *The king came to my city*. You find the vocabulary necessary to scan this example below.

• (lugal) king

• (im) *finite verb marker*

• (ĝen) to come

• (še3) to, towards

• (uru) city

• (uru.ĝu10) my city

• (uru ĝu10 she-goal) to my city

Modal Prefix (MP)

The modal prefixes express modality, i.e., relationships to reality or truth. You can only learn the indicative and negation modal prefixes for now. You may learn the other prefixes when you encounter them in Sumerian documents.

Indicative: (\emptyset -)

In Sumerian, the indicative is unmarked. The empty prefix / \emptyset -/ may represent this fact in transliteration. However, people rarely show unmarked prefixes.

Negation: /nu-/

(tr nu un gu7)
He didn't eat it.

Let him: hhe2-

(tr hhe2 ib gu7 e)
Let him eat it.

Indeed: hha-

(tr hha an gu7)
He ate it, indeed.

Cohortative: ga-

(tr ga i3 ib2 gar re en ne en)
Let us put it there.

Prohibitive: na-

(tr na ab gu7 e)
He must not eat it.

Conjugation Prefix (CP)

The main Conjugation Prefixes (CP) are /mu-/ to indicate that the action occurs here, /bi2-/ in front of open vowels such as /i/, /ba/ to form mid-

dle/passive voice, /i3/ to create a finite verbal tense, and /ma/ in combination with /ra/ of benefit. Below, you will find a fairly complete list of Conjugation Prefixes, but you need to learn only /mu-/ and /i3/ for this first lesson.

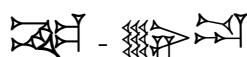
1. Here:



(tr mu un re6)

He brought it here.

2. Followed by open vowel:



(tr bi2 in re6)

He made the team bring it.

3. Followed by ra:



(tr ma ra an re6)

He brought it here to you.

4. Finite verb:



(tr i3 im êen)

He came here.

5. Middle voice:

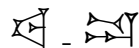


(tr ba an re6)

He took it for himself.

Obs. The middle voice with /ba/ indicates an action that affects the doer.

6. Passive voice:



(tr ba re6)

It was brought.

Nominal chain

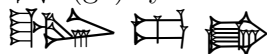
In Sumerian, most adjectives are formed from verbs by adding the suffix 𒄩 {a}. For example, the verb below means to be strong.

(kalag) to be strong



To form an adjective from kalag, one adds an {a}. In Sumerian, different from English, the adjectives follow the noun.

The expression below means *mighty king*. Note that the adjective follows the verb, and the 𒄩 marker contracts with the previous consonant to form the 𒄩 (ga) syllable.



(tr lugal kalag ga)

a mighty king

In English, the Saxon genitive is marked with S and precedes the verb. Therefore, one writes “*Elil’s Warrior*.” In Sumerian, the genitive is marked with {k} after a vowel and {ak} after a consonant. Like the adjective, the genitive follows the noun. The {k} of the genitive was rarely written except when combined with the ergative. In this case, it was written as 𒄩 {ke4}.

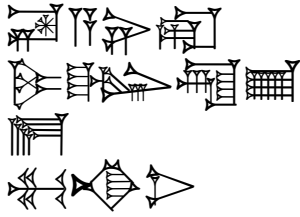
Below, there is another example of the adjective 𒄩 {a} marker contracting with the previous consonant to form an open syllable.



(tr e2 lugal la)

the king’s house

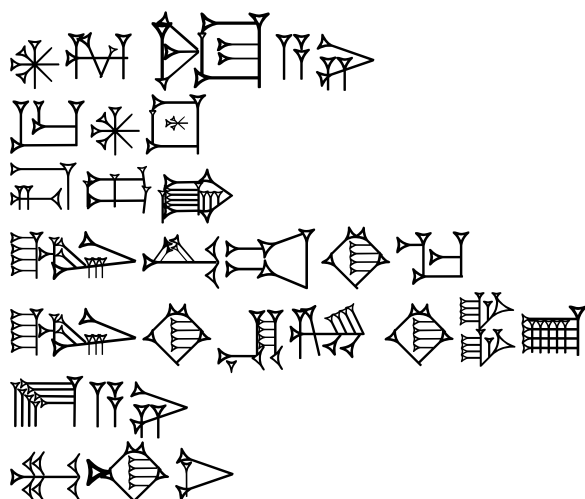
Now, let us examine a somewhat longer example of a noun chain.



(tr ama a ni ra) for his mother,
 (tr dumu lugal la ke4) by the king's son
 (tr e2) a house
 (tr mu na du3) was built for her

Chapter 2

Inscription in Inanna's temple



Translation: *For Inanna, his lady, Ur-Nammu, the mighty man, the king of Ur, the king of Sumer and Akad, built her temple.*

2.1 Sentence structure

1-	[inanna nin a ni].{(r)}	-- For Inanna, his Lady,
2-	[ur-nammu	-- Ur-Nammu,
3-	[nita kalag].{a}	-- the mighty man,
4-	[lugal urim ma].{(k)}	-- the king of Ur,
5-	[lugal ki-en-gi ki uri].{k}]{.e}	-- the king of Sumer and Akkad,
6-	[e2 a ni].{ }	-- her (Inanna's) temple
7-	mu na du3	-- built.

From now on, the sentence structure will not contain the comments
. {k} #gen for the genitive, . {r} #dat for the dative or . {e} #erg for the

ergative (doer of the task). The suffixes $\{r\}$ for the dative, $\{k\}$ for the genitive and $\{e\}$ for the ergative should suffice for showing the grammatical function of the noun chain and its components. However, functional suffixes you didn't learn in the previous lessons will be commented on.

2.2 Annotations

an inanna nin a ni

 (tr an inanna nin a ni)

For Inanna, his lady,

- (^dinana) Inanna
- (nin) lady, queen, mistress
- (a ni) his, her

This noun phrase ends in an unwritten $\{r\}$, the dative marker. However, there is no ambiguity since the verb chain has a dative reference.




ur-nammu nita kalag ga

 (tr ur-nammu nita kalag ga)





Ur-Nammu, the mighty man,



- (nita) man, male
- (kalag) to be strong, to be mighty
- (kalag ga) *adj. from verb*, mighty


One may form adjectives by adding a nominalizing $\{a\}$ -particle to a verbal root, *kalag* in the present expression. The nominalizing particle contracts with the preceding word's final *g*, giving extra information about its correct reading. Different from English, Sumerian adjectives follow the noun they modify.







 lugal urim ma
 (tr lugal urim ma)
the king of Ur,




As we learned from text 1, the genitive is formed by {k} after vowels and {ak} after consonants. The scribe often omitted the {(k)} of {ak}. The “m” of “ma” is contamination from the final consonant of the previous word.





 lugal ki-en-gi ki uri ke4
 (tr lugal ki-en-gi ki uri ke4)
the king of Sumer and Akkad,

 • (ki-en-gi) Sumer
 • (ki-uri) Akkad

In ke4 () , the {k} is the genitive marker, and the {e} is the ergative marker. You already saw the analysis of the last two lines in lesson 1, therefore they should pose no difficulty to you.




 e2 a ni
 (tr e2 a ni)
his temple

 (e2) house, temple
 (e2 me esh-pl) houses, temples
 (a ni) his



mu na du3

(tr mu na du3)

he has built for the god

➤ (du3) to build, to make, to plant



➤➤ (mu) *conjugation prefix (CP), ventive prefix, here*

➤➤ (na) *cross-references the dative*

APPENDIX 2: Conjugation

Congratulations again! You have finished the second lesson. This appendix details Sumerian pronouns and verbs. You can return to it after completing the fifth lesson to gain an in-depth understanding of possessive pronouns, independent pronouns, interrogative pronouns and verb conjugation.

Possessive Pronouns

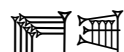
In the first lesson, you found two instances of a possessive pronoun in the expressions  (tr lugar ani) “his master”, and  (tr uru ĝu10-my) “my city”. Below, I’ve included a complete list of possessive pronouns.

(tr e2 ĝu10)



my house

(tr e2 zu)



thy house

(tr e2 a ni)



his house

(tr e2 bi)



its house

(tr e2 me)



our house

(tr e2 zu ne ne)



your house

(tr e2 a ne ne)



their house

Independent pronouns

Sumerian has a set of independent pronouns that I advise you to learn right away. They are very important.

(ĝe26) I/me



(ze2) thou/thee



Obs. (ze2) becomes (za) when followed by the dative (ra).

(a-ne) he/she/him/her



(a-ne-ne) they



a ne	dab5	za ra	ma ra ab shum2 mu
he	the tablet	to you	will give

He will give you the tablet.

Vocabulary

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣 (a-ne) he/she

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣 (dab5) the tablet

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣 (zara) to you. 𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣 (ze2) plus 𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣 (ra) becomes 𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣

Sometimes, an independent pronoun appears with an enclitic copula (verb *to be*) attached to its end, as shown below.

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣	𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣	𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣	𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣
gu5-li	zu	ġe26	me en
friend	your	I	am

I am your friend

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣
 (tr gu5 li zu (your friend) ġe26 me en (I am))
 I am your friend.

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣
 (tr gu5 li ġu10-my (my friend) ze2 me en (you are))
 You are my friend.

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣
 (tr gu5 li zu (your friend) a ne am3 (she/he is))
 She is your friend.

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣
 (tr gu5 li zu (your friend) me en ne en (we are))
 We are your friends.

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣
 (tr gu5 li ġu10-my (my friend) me en ze2 en (you guys))
 You guys are my friends.

𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣
 (tr gu5 li zu (your friends) a ne ne me esh-pl (they are))
 They are your friends.

Interrogative pronouns

Sumerians marked yes/no interrogative sentences only by intonation and possibly by lengthening the final vowels, like many modern languages, such as Spanish and Portuguese.

To ask who performed a task, Sumerians used the interrogative word 𒀭𒄩𒀭 (tr a ba a), as shown below.

𒂍𒅗 . 𒀭𒄩𒀭 . 𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗
 (tr e2 • a ba a • in du3)
 the temple • who • built?
 Who built the temple?

To ask who is something, Sumerians used the interrogative pronoun 𒀭𒄩 (tr a-ba), as shown in the following example:

𒀭𒄩 . 𒄩𒃼𒄩 . 𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗
 (tr a ba • utu • gin-equitative)
 Who • Utu • is like?
 Who is like Utu?

In Sumerian, there is no *wh*-movement to the beginning of the clause, like in English and Spanish. Instead, the interrogative words are placed immediately before the verb.


𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗 . 𒀭𒄩𒀭 . 𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗
 (tr lugal e • a na • mu un ak)
 the king • what • did he do?
 What did the king do?

𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗 . 𒀭𒄩𒀭 . 𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗𒂍𒅗
 (tr dumu ĝu10-my • a na • nu zu)
 my son • what • does not know?
 What does my son not know?

An exception to the rule of placing the interrogative word immediately before the verb occurs in *why*-questions, as the example below shows.

The expression (a-na-ash) that one usually translates as “why?” means literally “what for?”

Sumerian verbs have two aspects: the hamtu (perfective) and the marû (imperfective). For the time being, you can translate the hamtu as the English present perfect, and the marû, as the English future.

marû: 
(tr lugal e bad3 i3 gub e)
The king will erect a wall.

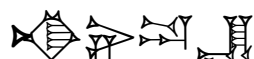
Hamtu and marû conjugation

First person



(tr na mu gub)

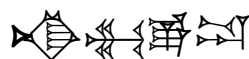
hamtu: I have set up a border stone.



(tr na i3 gub en)

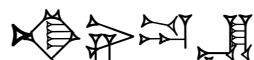
marû: I will set up a stone.

Second person singular



(tr na mu e gub)

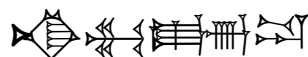
hamtu: You have set up a stone.



(tr na i3 gub en)

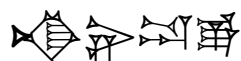
marû: You will set up a stone.

Third person singular (humans)



(tr na mu un gub)

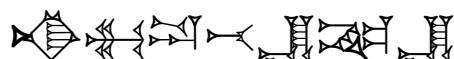
hamtu: He has set up a stone.



(tr na i3 gub e)

marû: He will set up a stone.

First person plural



(tr na mu gub be en de3 en)

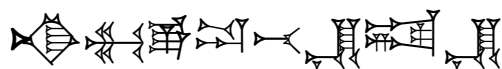
hamtu: We have set up a stone.



(tr na i3 gub en de3 en)

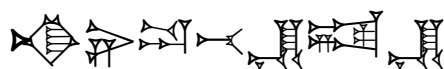
marû: We will set up a stone.

Second person plural



(tr na mu e gub be en ze2 en)

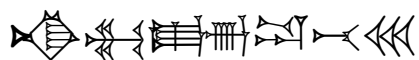
hamtu: You have set up a stone.



(tr na i3 gub be en ze2 en)

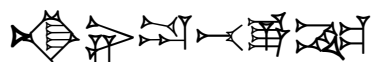
marû: You will set up a stone.

Third person plural



(tr na mu un gub be esh-pl)

hamtu: They have set up a stone.



(tr na i3 gub be e ne)

marû: They will set up a stone.

Animals and plants have different pronouns for the third person singular. Therefore, in the third person singular, the hamtu aspect is not the same for humans and animals.



(tr na mu ub gub)

It has set up a stone.

Intransitive verb conjugation

Intransitive verbs have the same forms for the hamtu and the marû aspects. Below is the complete conjugation of the verb 𒂗 (ġen), “to go” (or “to come”).

Singular

𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗
(tr i3 ġen en)
I went.

𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗
(tr i3 ġen en)
You went.

𒂗𒂗𒂗
(tr i3 ġen)
He went.

Plural

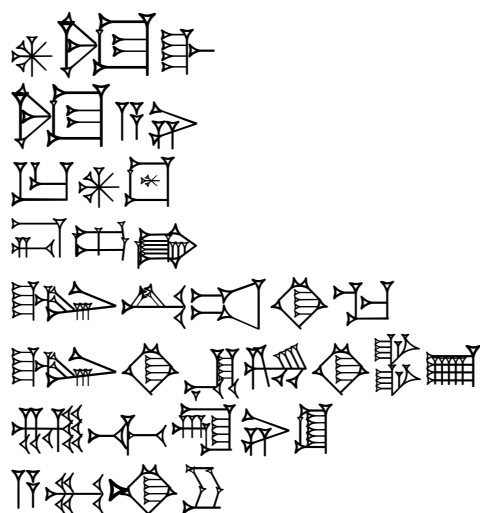
𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗
(tr i3 re7 en de3 en)
We went.

𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗
(tr i3 re7 en ze2 en)
You people went.

𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗
(tr i3 re7 esh)
They went.

Chapter 3

Ur-Nammu-31
























For Ningal, his lady, Ur-Nammu, the mighty man, the king of Ur, the king of Sumer and Akkad, dedicated this vessel for the protection of his life.

3.1 Sentence structure
















1- [ningal	-- For Ningal,
2- nin a ni].{(r)}	-- his Lady,
3- [ur-nammu	-- Ur-Nammu,
4- nita kalag.{a} #adjective	-- the mighty man,
5- [lugal urim5 ma].{(k)}	-- the king of Ur,
6- [lugal ki-en-gi ki uri].{k}].{e}	-- the king of Sumer and Akkad,
7- [nam til3 a ni].{she3} #goal	-- for the sake of his life,
8- a mu na ru	-- dedicated (this vessel).

3.2 Verbal chain








A Sumerian verb appears as a chain of affixes in a particular order, which is depicted in the table below for the most common occurrences.







Modal	Indicative	Negative	Coortative	Desiderative
Prefix	.∅ null prefix	 nu	 ga	 <i>or</i>  hha or hhe2
Conjugation	Finite	Coordinator	Ventive	Middle Voice
Prefix	 i3	  'n ga	 mu	 ba
Dimensional	Dative	Locative	Directive	
Prefix	 -na-	 -ni-	 -she3-	
Ergative	i3 du3	e du3	in du3	ib2 du3
Infix	  I built	  thou built	  s/he built	  they built
Verbal stem				

Example:

    	  	 		   
(tr an nin gal ra) for Ningal dative	(tr lugal e) the king ergative	(tr uru a) in the city locative	(tr e2) a temple absolutive	(tr na ni in du3) he built ref. dat/loc

Annotations

   	 	
(an) ningal	nin	a ni
(tr an ningal nin a ni)		
<i>For Ningal, his lady,</i>		

   	(^d Nin-gal) goddess of prisons
 	(nin) lady



ur-nammu nita kalag ga

(tr ur-nammu nita kalag ga)

Ur-Nammu, the mighty man,

(nita) man



(kalag) to be mighty

(ga) *adj. from verb*

lugal



urim

ma

(tr lugal urim ma)

the king of Ur,

(lugal) king



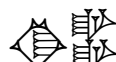
(urim) the city of Ur

(ma) *contr. of gen. with "m" of "urim"*

lugal



ki-en-gi



ki uri

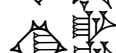


ke4

(tr lugal ki-en-gi ki uri ke4)






the king of Sumer and Akkad,

(ki-en-gi) Sumer




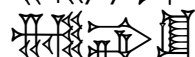

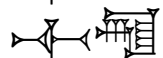
(ki uri) Akkad


(ke4) *adj. contraction gen/erg*










 nam til3 la ni she3

(tr nam til3 la ni she3)

for the sake of his life,

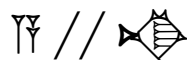
 (nam+ gen//she3) because of
 (nam bi she3) because of this
 (til3) to live, to be alive
 (til3 la(k)) of his life

The novelty in this inscription is the terminative marked with  (she3). According to Wikipedia, *Sumerians used the terminative case “-še” to indicate end-points in space or time and the targets or the goals of the action.*





 a mu na ru

(tr a mu na ru)

dedicated it (this object).

 (a//ru) to dedicate