An introduction

to

Sumerian Grammar

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PREFACE

This introduction to Sumerian grammar is basically a summary of my *Descriptive grammar of Sumerian* (DGS) from 2010 (http://hdl.handle.net/1887/16107). Large parts of the text and most of the examples come from that grammar. As a brief summary, this introduction offers only the main points and a few examples. Anyone interested in more is referred to DGS. There you will also find references to secondary literature.

This introduction differs from DGS in a number of points where DGS could be improved upon. These are the more important ones:

- the use of zero-morphemes has been dropped thoughout (following a suggestion by Guy Deutscher)
- the awkward label 'participles' for the non-finite verbal forms has been dropped (also following a suggestion by Guy Deutscher)
- it is now clearly recognized that almost all Sumerian verbs are labile (following a suggestion by Maarten Kossmann)
- the concept of slots is reintroduced to describe the structure of verbal forms (following an earlier version of DGS)

In addition, a few grammatical rules have been changed on points of detail.

I have refrained from discussing here other views on Sumerian grammar, because this is not of prime concern for beginning students. Such discussions can take place in class where and when appropriate. For the rest, the reader is referred to the annotated bibliography in Appendix A, which also includes an overview of the more important Sumerian grammars.

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1. THE LANGUAGE AND ITS SPEAKERS

1.1. The language

§1 Sumerian is an ancient Near Eastern language that was spoken more than four thousand years ago in southern Mesopotamia, in the area closest to the Persian Gulf. It is documented as a living language from the late fourth millennium, the date of the earliest cuneiform documents, until the early second millennium. Though no longer spoken, Sumerian continued to be used as a language of scholarship and cult until the end of the first millennium BC.

The name Sumerian comes from Akkadian *šumeru* 'Sumerian', of unknown origin. The Sumerians themselves called their language **eme-gi$_7$.r**, which contains the noun **eme** 'tongue, language' and a stem **gi$_7$.r** of uncertain meaning, perhaps 'native'.

Sumerian is a language isolate with no known relatives. Its position in a remote corner of the Near East shows it to be a last remnant of the languages that preceded the arrival of Semitic languages in the area. The Semitic languages belong to the Afro-Asiatic language family and their ultimate origin lies in Africa, but they spread into the Middle East very early. By 2600 BC, they had expanded so far into Syria and Mesopotamia that Akkadian was already used in parts of southern Mesopotamia, steadily reducing the area where Sumerian was spoken. This process of language shift in Mesopotamia did not only lead to the death of the Sumerian language itself, but most probably also obliterated its closest relatives.

Further reading: DGS pp. 1-4; RlA Sumer, Sumerisch; RlA Sumer, Geschichte.

1.2. Language contact with Akkadian

§2 Language shift is not something that happens overnight. It is preceded by a period with widespread bilingualism and intensive language contact. First, people spoke only Sumerian, then, when they came into contact with speakers of Akkadian, some people became bilingual and then more and more. In the end, the majority spoke only Akkadian until finally the last native speakers of Sumerian died. This process took many centuries and nobody knows when exactly Sumerian died out as a living, spoken language. Most scholars think, however, that this happened not later than the early Old Babylonian period.

In the preceding period of bilingualism and language contact, the two languages greatly influenced each other. Under Sumerian influence, Akkadian, for instance, acquired a ventive, lost several typically Semitic consonants, shifted to a verb-final word order, and borrowed many words from Sumerian. Sumerian likewise converged with Akkadian in a number of ways. It lost several sounds that were unknown to Akkadian and it borrowed many words from Akkadian.

Such lexical borrowing occurred already quite early. Sumerian actually shows several layers of loanwords borrowed from Akkadian during the third millennium BC. The most recent layer consists of nouns like ***za-ba-lum*** (a tree) (Cyl A 12:5; L; 22) from Akkadian *supālum*. They show the Akkadian nominative suffix *-um*. An earlier layer consists of nouns like ***dam-ḫa-ra*** 'battle' (Ent. 28 1:26; L; 25) from Akkadian *tamḫārum*. They have a suffix *-a*. Loanwords that are not nouns lack these suffixes *-um* and *-a*: e.g., **silim** 'whole' (Nik 1:287 2:2; L; 24) from Old Akkadian **śalim*.

Bilingualism also meant that some Sumerian texts were written by Akkadians and some Akkadian texts by Sumerians. As long as the scribes in question were fluent in the language they wrote we do not see any difference. But not all scribes were that fluent. During the Old Akkadian period the royal administration was in Akkadian and we see some Sumerian scribes struggle with that language. During the Ur III period, we see the exact opposite: now

Sumerian was tahe language of the royal administration and we see some Akkadian scribes struggle, producing Sumerian with a sprinkling of Akkadianisms.

Further reading: see DGS pp. 4, 9-10; Sommerfeld WZKM 102 (2012) pp. 209-212; Sallaberger CUSAS 6 pp. 335f.

1.3. Sources

§3 Sumerian is a dead language. All we have is a large number of written documents dating from a three thousand year long period. During that period the language changed considerably and so did its script and spelling. What also changed over time was the role that writing in Sumerian played in Mesopotamian society. We can distinguish the following main periods:

- ***The period of the archaic texts (ca. 3200-2700 BC)***
  The archaic texts are written in a somewhat rudimentary script called proto-cuneiform. It was invented and used for administrative purposes. What we have are administrative and lexical texts, the latter used for training new scribes.The earliest archaic texts are from Uruk and date to the Uruk III and Uruk IV periods (ca. 3200-3000 BC). The archaic texts from Ur (ca. 2800 BC) provide the first unambiguous spellings of grammatical elements.
- ***The Fara period (ca. 2600-2500 BC)***
  The spelling of grammatical elements becomes more common, making the script suitable for more complicated messages. In addition to administrative texts and lexical texts, there are now also legal documents, incantations, numerous literary texts, and royal inscriptions. The main text finds are from Fara (ancient Shuruppak) and Abu Salabikh.
- ***The Old Sumerian period (ca. 2470-2340 BC)***
  The about 3500 published Sumerian texts include administrative texts, royal and dedicatory inscriptions, a few letters and legal documents, as well as a small number of mostly fragmentary literary texts. The most important text finds are from Girsu, but there are also smaller groups from Nippur, Adab, and Umma.
- ***The Old Akkadian period (ca. 2340-2200 BC)***
  The kings of Akkad ruled Mesopotamia and their language, Akkadian, was the primary language of the royal administration. This period has so far supplied about 4800 published texts in Sumerian, primarily administrative, but also a few legal documents, letters and inscriptions. They come from basically the same sites as in the preceding period.
- ***The early Neo-Sumerian period (ca. 2200-2113 BC)***
  Outside Lagash we speak of the Guti-period, which has yielded only a few royal inscriptions. For Lagash, however, the picture is quite different. After the Old Akkadian period, the so-called second dynasty of Lagash ruled there (Lagash II, for short). This dynasty and especially its principal ruler, Gudea, has provided us with a set of royal inscriptions that surpasses all others in size, scope, and quality. Apart from over two hundred regular royal and dedicatory inscriptions, this group contains 26 inscriptions on statues, including a few very substantial ones, and, above all, two clay cylinders with over 1300 lines of narrative text.
- ***The later Neo-Sumerian or Ur III period (ca. 2112-2004 BC)***
  Mesopotamia was again politically unified, this time under the Third dynasty of Ur. It was a time when the king and his representatives relied more than ever before on written documents for managing their resources. And they did so primarily in

Sumerian. This period has yielded over 65,000 published Sumerian texts, mostly administrative but also including about two hundred royal inscriptions, three hundred court decisions, hundreds of letters, a few dozen incantations, and some literary texts.

- ***The early Old Babylonian period (ca. 2017-1722 BC)***
  This period is the last to produce large numbers of unilingual Sumerian texts. The ones excavated so far mostly date to the 18th century. The Old Babylonian period has yielded a great many administrative and legal documents in Sumerian, but most importantly it has been the source of thousands of literary texts and fragments which have made it possible to piece together hundreds and hundreds of literary compositions, among them myths, epics, hymns, and wisdom literature. In addition this period has provided us with numerous lexical texts, which are far more comprehensive and informative than ever before. But it is also the period when Akkadian had become the primary language of the scribes.
- ***The post-Sumerian period (ca. 1722-100 BC)***
  After the early Old Babylonian period, scribes continue to produce Sumerian texts until the late first millennium BC but usually with interlinear Akkadian translations added. Sumerian had become a language of scholarship and cult. These later texts are primarily lexical lists, literary texts, incantations, and cult songs.

Further reading: DGS pp. 4-6; OBO 160/1; OBO 160/3.

1.4. Dialects

§4 Sumerian was spoken during a long period and over a large area, in many different states, towns, and villages. It comes therefore as no surprise that it had dialects, distinct varieties of the language spoken in specific geographic areas. Unfortunately we know preciously little about them. Dialects were primarily a feature of the spoken language: the written language tended to be quite uniform. Yet, in the earlier periods, when political unification was still the exception, local scribal traditions were stronger and those usually reflected traits of the local dialects.

We can identify two main dialect clusters during the second half of the third millennium BC. We will call them Northern and Southern Sumerian. The former is at home in the general area of Nippur, Shuruppak, Adab, and Isin and the latter in Lagash, Umma, Ur, and Uruk. We will meet their defining properties later in this grammar.

A discussion of Sumerian dialects is not complete without mentioning Emesal. This is the Sumerian name (**eme-sal** 'thin tongue') of a dialect documented in certain literary and cultic texts dating from the Old Babylonian period or later. Some texts are fully in Emesal, among them the texts used by lamenters (**gala**). Other texts display a shift between Emesal and standard Sumerian sections. In such texts, it is primarily the direct speech of goddesses that is in Emesal. Emesal differs from standard Sumerian in vocabulary, pronunciation, and morphology.

Further reading: DGS pp. 6-9.

2. THE WRITING SYSTEM

§5 As a language Sumerian is not particularly complicated. Its grammar and vocabulary is certainly not more difficult to learn than for other languages. What makes the study of Sumerian more demanding is its script. Sumerian was written with an early form of the cuneiform script, which was invented around 3200 BC. It is one of the oldest scripts known and thus belongs to an early stage in the development of writing in general. And that is what

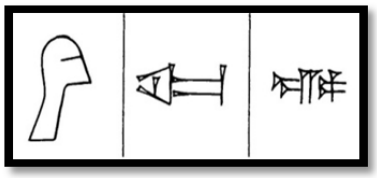
causes problems for us. Compared with later varieties of the script, Sumerian cuneiform spelling is still very defective: many things are simply not written out. For the Sumerians themselves that was not a huge problem. The scribes who used the script spoke Sumerian fluently and knew the general background of the texts quite well. They needed far less information for interpreting a text than we do.

So, how does the Sumerian script work and what are its limitations? We will start with the signs that make up this script: their basic forms (§§6ff.) and uses (§§9ff.). After that we will look at the main Sumerian spelling rules and how they handicap us modern readers (§§15ff.).

Further reading for this chapter: RlA Keilschrift. DGS chapter 2.

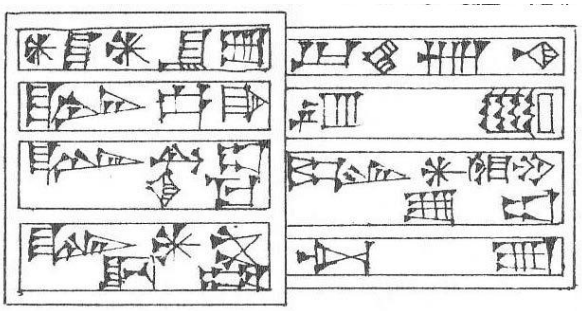
2.1. The signs: their basic forms

§6 'Cuneiform' gets its name from the wedges that make up individual signs (Latin *cuneus* 'wedge'). The script, however, started out with many more or less picture-like signs. Only later, when the scribes switched to pressing in the basic shapes of the signs, the typical wedge-shapes became the norm. A nice example is the sign SAG, with its forms from ca. 3000, 2200, and 700 BC:



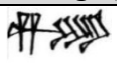
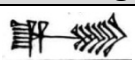
§7 At some point in time, all signs were rotated ninety degrees counterclockwise. As compared with the earlier signs, all of them are lying on their back, so to speak. For us, however, it is more convenient to read these earlier texts in the same direction as later cuneiform texts, even though this direction is historically wrong. The true direction of the script is shown most clearly where an inscription is found together with an image. Take, for example, this drawing of a seal impression from the Ur III period (AUCT 3 plate 1; D; 21):

This inscription clearly runs vertically, from right to left, but we read it nowadays as in later cuneiform: horizontally, from left to right, like this:



Of course, the Sumerians would laugh their heads off if they saw us reading this way.

§8 The number of individual signs changes across time but is somewhere around the five hundred. The number of basic signs is much smaller, though, because many signs are derived from more basic signs. These are the main types of such derivative signs:

Basic sign(s)	***Sign(s)***	***Derived sign***	***Make-up***	***Sign***
	GI		GI-*gunû*	GI_4
	DU		DU-*šessig*	KAS_4
	$GANA_2$		$GANA_2$-*tenû*	KAR_2
	GAL & LU_2		GAL+LU_2	LUGAL
	KA & ME		KAxME	EME

A so-called *gunû*-sign (e.g. GI_4) is derived from another sign by adding a few parallel wedges, a *šessig*-sign (e.g. KAS_4) by adding a few *Winkelhaken*, and a *tenû*-sign (e.g. KAR_2) by rotating the sign 45 degrees clockwise. The *gunû*-signs are by far the most common of these three. However, most derivative signs are composites of two or more basic signs. They either consist of two separate signs written as a single sign (e.g. LUGAL) or they involve a sign with one or more other signs written smaller inside or beside it (e.g. EME). This latter type is very numerous.

2.2. The signs: their basic uses

§9 A cuneiform sign can be used as a logogram, as a phonogram, as a determinative, or as a phonetic complement.

2.2.1. Logograms

§10 A logogram is a symbol for writing an entire word (Greek *logos* 'word' and *gramma* 'something written, letter'). It stands for a linguistic unit that has both a form (a pronunciation) and a meaning. You can see how this works from how we write and read numerals. Take, for instance, the symbol *3*. In an English text this is read *three*, but in a French text *trois*, and in a German one *drei*. Logograms work like this: they are signs for words, but the reader has to supply their pronunciation. Thus, the sign DUMU stands for a form of *mārum* in an Akkadian text, but for a form of *dumu* in a Sumerian text.

We are no Sumerians and we do not speak the language. So, how do we know the pronunciation of a Sumerian logogram? Fortunately for us, Akkadian scribes come to our aid.

They produced numerous lexical lists, most of them dating from the Old Babylonian period or later, that give the pronunciation of Sumerian logograms. Such lists have entries like this:

(1) *ba-ad* BAD *pe-tu-u$_4$-u*[*m*]
'*bad* (is the pronunciation of the sign) BAD (with the meaning) "open"' (MSL 14 p. 93 Proto-Aa 108:1; N; OB)

Accordingly, we read and transliterate the sign BAD as **bad** when it is used to write the Sumerian verb 'open'. In this particular case, our transliteration is based on an Old Babylonian pronunciation of the word. For many Sumerian words, we only have such information from a much later date: from the first millennium BC, for example.

As a result, we transliterate Old Sumerian logograms from the 24th century BC according to their pronunciation in the 18th century BC or even later. Languages change and so did Sumerian. The older our texts are, the further away our transliterations will be from how the words were actually pronounced at the time.

One and the same Sumerian word may be transliterated in more than one way. Partly, this is due to differences in our sources. If different texts provide different or ambiguous pronunciations for the same Sumerian word, that results in different transliterations. Thus, the Sumerian word for 'basket' may be transliterated as **pisan**, **pisaĝ** (**pisaŋ**), **bisan**, **bisaĝ** (**bisaŋ**), and **bešeĝ** (**bešeŋ**).

In addition, there are two different approaches among Sumerologists to the transliteration of words with final consonants. For various reasons, some prefer transliterations that include the final consonants ('long values'), while others prefer transliterations without them ('short values'). Thus, the Sumerian word for 'heart' may be transliterated as **šag$_4$** or **ša$_3$**, 'shepherd' as **sipad** or as **sipa**, and so on.

§11 There are many more Sumerian words than there are cuneiform signs. Most logograms are, therefore, used to write several different words. The sign KA, for instance, is used as a logogram for the words **ka** 'mouth', **zu$_2$** 'tooth', **zuḫ** 'steal', **giri$_{17}$** 'nose', **du$_{11}$** 'speak', or **inim** 'word'. In addition, the script makes use of so-called *diri*-writings, where two or more separate signs are used to write a single word. Thus, the signs SI.A make up the logogram for the word **diri** 'exceed'. By using these two methods, the Sumerians were able to write several thousands of different words with just a few hundred cuneiform signs.

2.2.2. Phonograms

§12 Phonograms are symbols for writing phonemes (Greek *phone* 'sound'). They stand for linguistic units that have a form (a pronunciation) but no meaning. A good example is our own alphabet, which consists of a set of phonograms, each of which represents a sound. Sumerian phonograms work a bit differently, because they usually stand for two or more sounds at the same time. For this reason they are often called 'syllabograms', but because they are not really symbols for syllables, it is better to call them 'phonograms'.

All signs can be used as logograms but only some also as phonograms. Their phonographic value is always in some way derived from their logographic value. Thus, the sign URU is used as a logogram for the word **iri** 'town' and as phonogram for ***ri$_2$*** and ***re$_2$***. The sign AN stands for **an** 'heaven' and as a phonogram for ***an***. And so on.

The full set of phonograms in use is called the 'syllabary'. It may differ from scribe to scribe, from town to town, and from one period to the next. In Old Sumerian Lagash, for example, the sign URU is used as a phonogram ***re$_2$*** for the sequence /re/, but in Neo-Sumerian Lagash the sign RI (***re***) is used instead.

Usually cuneiform is transliterated in such a way, that we can see which signs are logograms and which phonograms. We transliterate, for example, E$_2$.GAL-*lim*, where

Akkadian *ekallim* is written with the logogram E_2.GAL and the phonogram *-lim*. Sumerologists do not work in this way. They do not distinguish between logograms and phonograms. They transliterate, for example, *e_2-gal-la*, not E_2.GAL-*la* like the method for Akkadian. This introduction, however, transliterates phonograms with italics, so that logograms and phonograms are clearly distinguished: **e_2-gal-*la***. But this is not common practice.

2.2.3. Determinatives

§13 A determinative is a logogram used as an auxiliary sign. It gives information about the meaning of the following or preceding word and is transliterated in superscript. The logogram **diŋir** 'god', for example, is also used as a determinative before the names of gods: ^{d}**inanna** '(the goddess) Inanna', ^{d}**en-lil$_2$** '(the god) Enlil'. Other logograms commonly used as determinatives are **ki** 'place' after names of towns, and **ŋeš** 'wood' before the names of wooden objects: e.g., **umma**^{ki} '(the city) Umma', ^{ŋeš}**apin** 'plough'.

2.2.4. Phonetic complements

§14 A phonetic complement is a phonogram used as an auxiliary sign. It gives information about the pronunciation of another sign. Phonetic complements have two uses.

The first use is obligatory. Phonetic complements can be used together with other signs to create new logographic writings. For example:

- The logogram EME for **eme** 'tongue' is a composite of the sign KA and the phonetic complement ***me***.
- The *diri*-writing ŠIR.BUR.LA for **lagas** consists of the two signs ŠIR.BUR and the phonetic complement ***la***.

Such phonetic complements are an integral part of these composite signs and are usually not transliterated separately.

The second use is optional. A phonetic complement can be added to another sign to make clear which reading is meant. It is then transliterated in superscript. For example: ^{d}**nin-gilin**$^{gi_4\text{-}li_2}$***-na*** (Ukg. 4 5:4; L; 24), ***mar***^{ar}***-ḫa-ši***^{ki} (MVN 15:199 10; D; 21), ***in-ni-***^{ŋa_2}**ŋar**^{ar} (NG 46 4; L; 21), ***ba-an-*****šub**^{ub} (NG 202 4; U; 21).

2.3. Sumerian spelling

§15 We have already encountered one crucial trait of Sumerian spelling: most signs have multiple uses. The sign AN, for instance, is used as a logogram for the words **an** 'heaven' and **diŋir** 'god', it is employed as a determinative (^{d}) for names of gods, and it also occurs as a phonogram with the values ***an*** and ***am$_6$***. In addition, it is found in *diri*-writings like AN.NA, the logographic writing for **nagga** 'tin', and A.AN, the phonographic writing for ***am$_3$***.

The Sumerian script evolved from a purely logographic script (ca. 3200 BC) to one based on a mixture of logographic and phonographic writing (ca. 2500 BC). At first, all words were written with logograms only, with complete disregard of different grammatical forms. But around 2500 BC a crucial spelling reform was implemented: from then on logograms were only used to write the stems of words. All the grammatical morphemes were as much as possible written out with phonograms. Even an increasing number of stems came to be written with phonograms.

§16 Sumerian phonographic spelling generally ignores syllable-final consonants. At first, the Sumerians used just a single phonogram to write a complete syllable, but they lacked the signs to write all possible syllables in this way. They solved this problem by simply not

writing syllable-final consonants. If they needed to write the syllable /nan/, for example, they simply wrote ***na*** because they had no sign for /nan/. Akkadians later invented the CV-VC-spelling, that is, writing /nan/ as ***na-an***, but the Sumerians never fully adopted this method. Instead, they generally continued their old habit of not writing syllable-final consonants. This conservative attitude explains why a verbal form like /munnanřu/ 'he built it for her/him' is still written ***mu-na-*****du₃** in the Old Babylonian period, many centuries after the CV-VC spelling was invented.

§17 Sumerian phonographic spelling usually makes no difference between short and long vowels. From the Old Akkadian period onwards, however, the scribes sometimes use so-called *plene*-spellings to express long vowels: this involves using an additional vowel sign after or before the long vowel. Thus, ***ge-e-en₆*** represents /gēn/ and ***i₃-in-*****ŋar** stands for /īnŋar/.

§18 Sumerian phonographic spelling may be close to the actual pronunciation or may be more abstract. The form /engare/, which is the word **engar** 'farmer' with the case marker =*e*, can, for instance, be written in two different ways:

- **engar-*re*** (e.g. CT 44 pl. 44 obv. 19; L; 21) with the final syllable written out fully.
- **engar-*e*** (e.g. TCTI 2 L.4309 6; L; 21) with only the case marker written out.

§19 The Sumerian script does not indicate word boundaries. Instead, every text is divided into groups of signs that may make up anything from a single word to a complete sentence. The earliest texts were divided into narrow columns consisting of larger and smaller cases. From the later Old Akkadian period onwards, texts were increasingly divided into lines instead of cases, while the use of columns was restricted to large texts. Generally speaking, the earlier system of cases works with smaller groups of signs than the later system of lines.

3. PHONOLOGY

§20 Early Old Babylonian Sumerian had sixteen consonants:

	Labial	***Dental/Alveolar***	***Palatal***	***Velar***
Stops	**b**	**d**		**g**
	p	**t**		**k**
Affricates		**z**		
		ř		
Fricatives		**s**	**š**	**ḫ**
Nasals	**m**	**n**		**ŋ**
Lateral		**l**		
Tap		**r**		

All of them also occur in Akkadian, except /ř/ and /ŋ/. The former is usually called the /d^{r}/-phoneme. Its original pronunciation may have been something like [ts^{h}], but it later became either /d/ or /r/. The /ŋ/ is often transliterated as <ng>, <g>, <ĝ>, or the like. It is pronounced as <ng> in *long*. The /š/ is pronounced as <sh> in *shame*. The sound /ḫ/ does not exist in English. It is pronounced as German <ch> in *Bach*. All other consonants are pronounced as in English.

Old Sumerian seems to have had at least three more consonants: /h/, /j/, and /ʔ/. They were lost before the Old Babylonian period and are not transliterated. The Sumerian word for 'house', for example, was earlier /haj/ but became /ē/. The cuneiform sign, however, is always transliterated as **e₂**, which reflects the Old Babylonian pronunciation.

Sumerian had four vowels: /a/, /e/, /i/, and /u/. They do not only occur as short but also as long vowels: /ā/, /ē/, /ī/, and /ū/.

Syllables have the structure (C)V(C), where the vowel (V) may be either short or long. Possible Sumerian syllables are therefore V, VC, CV, and CVC, with again the vowel being short or long. A sequence of two vowels is not possible. Where we transliterate such a sequence, there is in actual fact always a consonant between them. In Old Babylonian Sumerian, this consonant usually was a glide /j/ or /w/. E.g.: **a-a** [aja] and **nu$_2$-*a*** [nuwa]. In Old Sumerian, it often was a glottal stop: [aʔa] and [nuʔa]. The details are still quite uncertain, though.

All consonants are found at the beginning of a syllable, but some of them are never or hardly ever found at the end of a syllable. Thus, syllables with a final /p/ or /t/ do not exist in Sumerian, while those with a final /k/ and /ř/ are very rare. There are many syllables with a final /b/, /d/, or /g/, but there is some evidence that /d/ and /g/ were reduced or perhaps even lost in word-final position. This is why many Sumerologists transliterate **pa$_3$** and **du$_{11}$** instead of **pad$_3$** and **dug$_4$**.

§21 The Southern Old Sumerian dialect has a rule of vowel harmony: certain verbal prefixes have the vowel /e/ before a syllable with /e/ or /a/, while they have the vowel /i/ before a syllable with /i/ or /u/. An example is the prefix *bi-* 'on it': ***be$_2$*-ŋar** 'he placed it on it' (DP 346 2:5; L; 24), ***bi$_2$*-dub** 'he heaped it on it' (Ean. 1 obv 11:15; L; 25).

Further reading: DGS chapter 3.

4. Basic structure of a Sumerian clause

§22 A Sumerian clause consists of a verbal form and, as a rule, one or more noun phrases. Take, for example, the following clause:

(2) **ensi$_2$-*ke$_4$* e$_2$ *mu*-du$_3$**
ensi$_2$.k=e e$_2$.j mu -n -du$_3$
ruler =ERG house(ABS) VENT-3SG.A-erect
'The ruler built the temple.' (Cyl A 22:9; L; 22)

This clause is made up from three parts. Its central part is the finite verbal form ***mu*-du$_3$** 'he erected it (hither)'. The verbal form is always the last word of the clause. The other parts of clause always precede the verbal form and are here two noun phrases: **ensi$_2$-*ke$_4$*** 'the ruler' (in the ergative case) and **e$_2$** 'the house' (in the absolutive case). This clause is transitive: it contains both a subject and a direct object. The noun phrase in the ergative case expresses the subject and the noun phrase in the absolutive case the direct object.

Consider now an intransitive clause, which contains a subject but no direct object:

(3) **elam elam-*ta* *mu*-*na*-ŋen**
elam elam=ta mu -nna -ŋen
Elam(ABS) Elam=ABL VENT-3SG.IO-go:PFV
'Elam came to him from Elam.' (Cyl A 15:6; L; 22)

Here the noun phrase in the absolutive case expresses the subject.

As for its case marking of subject and object, Sumerian is an ergative language and differs from Akkadian and most European languages, which are accusative languages. In an accusative language such as English, the subject of a transitive clause is expressed in the same way as the subject of an intransitive clause, but differently from the direct object:

- *He killed him* (transitive)
- *He ran* (intransitive)

In an ergative language, the direct object of a transitive clause is expressed in the same way as the subject of an intransitive clause, but differently from the subject of a transitive clause. If English had been an ergative language, the two clauses above would have been like this:

- **He killed him* (transitive)
- **Him ran* (intransitive)

Sumerian case marking follows this ergative pattern.

5. NOUNS

§23 Most Sumerian words are nouns. Some are basic nouns, such as **dumu** 'son', **e$_2$** 'house', and **iri** 'town'. Other nouns are compounds, such as:

- **e$_2$-muḫaldim** 'kitchen' (lit. 'cook house' < **e$_2$** 'house' and **muḫaldim** 'cook')
- **ki-tuš** 'dwelling' (lit. 'sitting place' < **ki** 'place' and the verb **tuš** 'sit')
- **dub-sar** 'scribe' (lit. 'tablet writer' < **dub** 'tablet' and the verb **sar** 'write')
- **e$_2$-gal** 'palace' (lit. 'big house' < **e$_2$** 'house' and the adjective **gal** 'big')

Compounds with ***nam*** 'fate, status' have an abstract meaning. Thus, while **lugal** means 'king', ***nam*-lugal** means 'kingship'.

A few nouns come from other word classes, such as **sukud** 'height' from the adjective **sukud** 'high' and **kas$_4$** 'runner' from the verb **kas$_4$** 'run'.

§24 The nouns are divided into two classes on the basis of their meaning. In German the two classes are called 'Personenklasse' and 'Sachklasse'. In English, several different terms are in use for the two classes, e.g. 'animate' and 'inanimate'. We will call them 'human' and non-human'. The human class includes all nouns that refer to human beings or gods. E.g.:

- proper names of persons or gods;
- kinship terms, e.g., **ses** 'brother', **dam** 'wife', and **dumu** 'child';
- terms for occupations, e.g., **dub-sar** 'scribe' and **sipa.d** 'shepherd';
- generic terms, e.g., **diŋir** 'god', **lu$_2$** 'man', and **munus** 'woman'.

All other nouns are non-human. The non-human class includes designations of:

- plants, e.g., **ŋeš** 'tree', **ḫašḫur** 'apple', **še** 'barley';
- animals, e.g., **udu** 'sheep', **anše** 'donkey';
- all kinds of objects, e.g., **na$_4$** 'stone', **apin** 'plough', **mar** 'wagon', **balaŋ** 'harp', **gada** 'linen garment';
- geographical phenomena, **iri** 'town', **kur** 'mountain', **id$_2$** 'river';
- abstract nouns, e.g., ***nam*-lugal** 'kingship'.

Note that words for 'slave' and groups of persons are often treated as belonging to the non-human class.

§25 Sumerian has no article. Thus, **lugal** can mean 'king', 'the king', or 'a king'.

§26 Non-human nouns have no special form for the plural. Thus, **e$_2$** can mean both 'house' and 'houses'. The plural of human nouns is expressed with the enclitic plural marker *=enē*. E.g.:

(4) **engar-*re$_2$-ne***
engar =enē
farmer=PL
'the farmers' (Ukg. 6 1:14'; L; 24)

After a vowel, the initial /e/ of *=enē* is dropped:

(5) **ugula-*ne***

ugula =enē
foreman=PL
'the foremen' (Ukg. 6 1:12'; L; 24)

There can be other words between a noun and its plural marker. See §28 for the relative order of the parts of a noun phrase.

§27 Nouns can be reduplicated. This involves a full repetition of the stem. The standard spelling for a reduplicated noun is to write it twice. E.g.:

(6) **kur-kur**
kur -kur
mountains-mountains
'the foreign lands' (Cyl B 22:20; L; 22)

With the noun **kur**, reduplication has come to express a simple plural, but this noun is an exception. With other nouns reduplication is only very rarely used. When present, it usually emphasizes the separateness of each individual among multiple entities. It refers to entities 'here and there'. Thus, **ŋi$_6$-ŋi$_6$** does not simply mean 'nights' but 'night after night' (Cyl A 8:2-3; L; 22) and **ib$_2$-ib$_2$-*ŋu$_{10}$*** not simply 'my hips', but rather 'each of my hips' (Shulgi X 21, OB copy). Often, the reduplication simply conveys a meaning 'all':

(7) **ama dumu-dumu-*ne***
ama dumu-dumu=enē=ak
mother child -child =PL =GEN
'mother of all children' (St A 1:3; L; 22)

Further reading: DGS chapter 6.

6. BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE NOUN PHRASE

§28 At its most simple, a noun phrase consists of just a noun and nothing else, e.g. **e$_2$** 'house'. Most noun phrases are more complex, though. They begin with their head noun and end with an enclitic case marker. In between, there can be a wide variety of additional elements. The most common parts of a noun phrase are in the following order:

(1) Head noun
(2) Attributive adjective
(3) Noun phrase in the genitive case
(4) Enclitic pronoun
(5) Enclitic plural marker =*enē*
(6) Enclitic case marker

Thus, the following noun phrase has the structure 1 + 2 + 6:

(8) **dub daŋal-*a***
dub daŋal=ʔa
tablet wide =LOC
'on the broad tablet' (DP 104 3:3; L; 24)

A noun phrase in the genitive case can be part of a larger noun phrase. Thus, this noun phrase has the structure 1 + 2 + 3, where 3 itself has the structure 1 + 6:

(9) **alan gal lugal-an-*da***
alan gal lugal.an.da=ak
statue big Lugalanda =GEN
'the large statue of Lugalanda' (DP 66 6:8; L; 24)

Such nesting of noun phrases within noun phrases leads to an accumulation of clitics at their end. Thus, this noun phrase has the structure 1 + 3 (=1 + 6) + 6, with two case markers at the end, each belonging to a different noun phrase:

(10) **izim ^{d}*ba-u$_2$-ka***
izim ba.u$_2$=ak =ʔa
festival Bau =GEN=LOC
'during the festival of the goddess Bau' (DP 77 6:1; L; 24)

And so the clustering of clitics at the end may go on:

(11) **ka dumu-*ne-ne-ka***
ka.g dumu=ane =enē=ak =ʔa
mouth child =3SG.POSS=PL =GEN=LOC
'in the mouth of her children' (NG 171 5; L; 21)

This noun phrase has the structure 1 + 3 (=1 + 4 + 5 + 6) + 6.

§29 A noun phrase can contain more parts than those listed above. The head noun may, for example, be followed by an apposition. The head noun and following apposition then share a single case marker. E.g.:

(12) **gu$_3$-de$_2$-*a*, ensi$_2$, lagas^{ki}-*a***
gu$_3$.de$_2$.a ensi$_2$.k lagas =ak
Gudea ruler Lagas=GEN
'Gudea, the ruler of Lagas' (St E 7:17-19; L; 22)

(13) **en ^{d}nin-*ŋir$_2$-su-ka***
en nin.ŋir$_2$.su.k=ak
lord Ningirsu =GEN
'of lord Ningirsu' (St B 9:28; L; 22)

But if there are several appositions, the case marker may be repeated after each apposition.

A noun phrase may also contain a numeral (see §§52ff.) or a relative clause (see §128).

Further reading: DGS chapter 5.

7. THE PHRASE-FINAL CLITICS

§30 As we saw in the previous chapter, a noun phrase begins with its head noun and ends with its clitics, everything else coming in between. In this chapter we take a closer look at these clitics, which we will call the 'phrase-final clitics', because we always find them at the very end of the noun phrase to which they belong.

What are clitics? Clitics are an intermediate category between words and affixes, without being either. They differ from words because they are never found on their own but must always be attached to some other word. They differ from affixes in what they are attached to. Affixes are attached to a member of a specific word class, to a verb or to a noun, for example. Phrase-final clitics, however, are attached to the last word of a noun phrase and it does not matter at all to which word class this last word belongs.

Clitics can be divided into *proclitics* and *enclitics*. Proclitics are attached *before* a word, enclitics *after* a word. The phrase-final clitics are enclitics. Note that Sumerian also has two proclitics: *nu*= (§110) and *ḫa*= (§112).

A single noun phrase may have up to three different clitics attached to it. They are always found in the same order:

(1) an enclitic possessive or demonstrative pronoun

(2) the enclitic plural marker =*enē*
(3) an enclitic case marker

The plural marker =*enē* has already been discussed above in §26. We will now look at the other clitics.

7.1. The enclitic case markers

§31 The following table gives the cases of Sumerian with their names, basic forms, and their primary meaning or function. All cases are expressed with an enclitic case marker, except the absolutive case, which is unmarked.

Case	Case marker		Primary meaning or function	See
	Human	***Non-human***		
Genitive	ak		'of'	§§32-35
Ergative	e		subject of a transitive clause	§37
Absolutive	(unmarked)		direct object (in a transitive clause), subject of an intransitive clause	
Dative	ra	-	indirect object or oblique object	§36
Directive	-	e	indirect object or oblique object	§37
Locative	ʔa		'on, in'	§38
Terminative	še		'to(wards)' (direction), 'for' (purpose)	§§39-40
Ablative	ta		'from' (direction), 'with' (instrument)	§41
Comitative	da		'with' (in the company of)	§42
Adverbiative	eš		'in the manner of'	§43
Equative	gen		'like, as'	§44

For the uses of the ergative and absolutive cases, see §22 above.

All Sumerian case markers except the ergative function very much like the English prepositions in *of the house*, *in the house*, *to the house*, and so on. Because of this and because they are placed after (*post*) the noun, the Sumerian case markers are also called 'postpositions'.

§32 The basic form of the genitive case marker is /ak/. E.g.:

(14) **e_2 iri ku_3-*ga-ka-ne*$_2$**
e_2.j iri ku_3.g=ak =ane
house city pure =GEN=3SG.POSS
'her temple in (lit. "her house of") the Holy City' (St D 3:17; L; 22)

The /k/ of /ak/ is lost everywhere except before a vowel. The /a/ of /ak/ is, as a rule, deleted after a vowel. E.g.:

(15) **sipa udu siki-*ka-da***
sipa.d udu siki =ak =ak =da
shepherd sheep wool=GEN=GEN=COM
'with the shepherd of wool sheep (lit. "of sheep of wool")' (VS 14:111 1:3; L; 24)

But in some forms it is the preceding vowel that is deleted, not the /a/ (see §45). The scribes often do not write the genitive case marker.

§33 Normally a genitive follows its head noun, as in the preceding examples. But there is also a different construction possible: the so-called anticipatory genitive. This is a noun phrase in the genitive case which stands in clause-initial position and which is resumed by a possessive pronoun elsewhere in the clause:

(16) **e-*ba* *a-ba* ^{d}nanna-*gen*$_7$, mu-*be*$_2$**
e.g =be =ak a.ba nanna=gen mu =be =m
dike=this=GEN who(ABS) Nanna=EQU name=3NH.POSS(ABS)=COP:3NH.S
'Of this dike "Who is like Nanna" is its name.' (FAOS 9/2 Urnammu 27 2:7-8; Ur; 21)

§34 Some nouns in the genitive case are not dependent on another noun: they have no head noun and are therefore called 'headless' genitives. A headless genitive expresses the same meanings as English 'one of ...', 'that of ...', and the like. E.g.:

(17) **ŋeštug$_2$ daŋal-*a-kam***
ŋeštug$_2$ daŋal=ak =ʔam
wisdom wide =GEN=COP:SSG.S
'He is very wise (lit. "He is one of wide wisdom").' (St C 2:17; L; 22)

(18) **an-*ta*-sur-*ra* *ŋa$_2$-kam***
an.ta.sur.ra ŋa$_2$.e=ak =ʔam
Antasurra(ABS) I =GEN=COP:3NH.S
'The (temple) Antasurra is mine (lit. "of me").' (En. I 29 8:5; L; 25)

§35 A genitive construction can express a single concept and have a meaning which is expressed by a compound noun in German. In this Sumerian is more similar to a language like French (e.g. *maison de poupée*) than to one like German (*Puppenhaus*). Such a genitive construction is semantically a unit and functions as a word-like unit in syntax. An example is **e$_2$ kišib-*ba*** 'storeroom' (lit. 'house of seal' ~ 'seal house'):

(19) **e$_2$ kišib-*ba* ensi$_2$-*ka-ta***
e$_2$.j kišib=ak ensi$_2$.k=ak =ta
house seal =GEN ruler =GEN=ABL
'from the storeroom of the ruler' (PIOL 19:386 2; U; 21)

§36 The basic form of the dative case marker is /ra/, but after a vowel the final /a/ is usually dropped. E.g.:

(20) **lugal-*ra***
lugal=ra
king =DAT
'to the king' (NRVN 1:180 12; N; 21)

(21) ***ab-ba-ne$_2$-er***
ab.ba=ane =ra
father=3SG.POSS=DAT
'for his father' (BCT 1:85 3; D; 21)

Because this form /r/ is a syllable-final consonant, the scribes often do not write it.

The dative is only used with nouns of the human class. It indicates an indirect object (§§85ff.) or an oblique object (§§89ff.). The directive case is the dative's counterpart with non-human nouns and has more or less the same functions.

§37 The ergative and directive case markers are identical in form and spelling. Both are /e/. This /e/ contracts with a preceding vowel. The resulting long vowel is sometimes written out with a plene spelling but usually not.

§38 The basic form of the locative case marker is /ʔa/. The initial /ʔ/ assimilates to a preceding consonant. The case marker is always written out, either as ***-a*** or as -C***a***, where C represents the preceding consonant. E.g.: **e$_2$-ninnu-*a*** 'into the Eninnu' (St B 6:68; L; 22), **unug^{ki}-*ga*** 'in Uruk' (FAOS 5/2 Lukin. 2 9; N; 24).

The locative case expresses a place and can usually be translated with 'in, into, on, onto'. It can also express a time. E.g.:

(22) **u$_4$ izim-*ma-ka***
u$_4$.d izim =ak =ʔa
day festival=GEN=LOC
'on the day of the festival' (FAOS 9/2 Šulgi 26 2:10; L; 21)

§39 The basic form of the terminative case marker is /še/, written ***-še$_3$***. After a vowel the final /e/ may be dropped. E.g.:

(23) **gu$_3$-de$_2$-*a-aš$_2$***
gu$_3$.de$_2$.a=še
Gudea =TERM
'towards Gudea' (Cyl B 3:4; L; 22)

Because this form /š/ is a syllable-final consonant, the scribes often do not write it.

The terminative case has many different uses. The most important ones are expressing a destination or a direction ('to, towards'), a time ('until'), or a purpose ('for'). See DGS §7.8.2. for examples and more details.

§40 Sumerian does not allow the use of two direct objects. Instead, one of the two is put in the terminative case, as in the second of the following two examples:

(24) **alan *na-ne$_2$*, *mu*-du$_2$**
alan na =ane mu -n -du$_2$.d
statue stone=3SG.POSS(ABS) VENT-3SG.A-give.birth.to
'He fashioned a stone statue of himself.' (St M 2:7-3:1; L; 22)

(25) **alan *na-ne$_2$-še$_3$*, *mu*-du$_2$**
alan na =ane =še mu -n -du$_2$.d
statue stone=3SG.POSS=TERM VENT-3SG.A-give.birth.to
'He fashioned it (= a block of stone) into a stone statue of himself.' (St C 3:16-17; L; 22)

§41 The ablative case marker is /ta/, written ***-ta***. It usually means 'from' or 'out of'. When it expresses a time, it means 'from, since, after'. With these meanings the ablative is the opposite of the terminative. E.g.:

(26) **a ab-*ba* igi-nim-*ta*, a ab-*ba* sig-*ga-še$_3$***
a.j ab=ak igi.nim=ak =ta a.j ab =ak sig =ak =še
water sea=GEN above =GEN=ABL water sea=GEN below=GEN=TERM
'from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea' (St B 5:25-26; L; 22)[1]

The ablative case can also indicate the instrument with which something is done ('with, by means of'). E.g.:

(27) **lugal-*e* ŋir$_2$-*ta* *in*-gaz**
lugal=e ŋir$_2$ =ta i -n -gaz
king =ERG knife=ABL VP-3SG.A-kill
'The king killed it with a knife.' (JCS 10 p. 28:5 6; D; 21)

[1] Note that the genitive construction **a ab-*ba***, lit. 'water of the sea', is the Sumerian expression for 'sea'.

The ablative case marker can also have a distributive meaning (‘each with ...’). E.g.:

(28) **a_2 u_4-*da* 1-*ta* *mu*-du_3**
a_2 u_4.d=ak 1=ta mu -n -du_3
labour day =GEN 1=ABL VENT-3SG.A-erect
‘He erected them (= seven stelas) with one day's work each (that is, it took him seven days in total).’ (Cyl A 23:3; L; 22)

§42 The basic form of the comitative case marker is /da/, written ***-da***. After a vowel the final /a/ may be dropped. The case marker is then never written. It means ‘together with’ in the sense of ‘in the company of’ or ‘in the presence of’. E.g.:

(29) **muḫaldim-*da* ŋen-*na***
muḫaldim=da ŋen -ʔa
cook =COM go:PFV-NMLZ
‘who went together with the cook’ (MVN 7:36 rev. 1; L; 21)

§43 The adverbiative case is rare and difficult to identify. Its basic form is /eš/, which is mostly written with the same sign $ŠE_3$ as the terminative case marker. It has a meaning ‘in the manner of’. E.g.: **zi-*de_3-$eš_2$*** ‘in the right way’.

§44 The equative case marker is /gen/ and is always written ***-gen_7***. This is often transliterated as ***-gin_7*** and in older publications as ***-gim***. The equative case is used in comparisons and means ‘like, as’.

(30) **ses-*$ŋu_{10}$*-*gen_7***
ses =ŋu =gen
brother=1SG.POSS=EQU
‘like my brother’ (TCS 1:346 5; D; 21)

Further reading: DGS chapter 7.

7.2. The enclitic possessive pronouns

§45 The enclitic possessive pronouns have the following basic forms:

Person	*Number*	*Class*	*Basic form*	*Spelling*	*Meaning*
First person	singular	human	ŋu	***-$ŋu_{10}$***	‘my’
Second person	singular	human	zu	***-zu***	‘your’ (sg.)
Third person	singular	human	ane	***-a-ne_2*** (***-a-ni***)	‘his’ or ‘her’
Third person	-	non-human	be	***-be_2*** (***-bi***)	‘its’ or ‘their’
First person	plural	human	mē	***-me***	‘our’
Second person	plural	human	zunē(nē)	***-zu-ne(-ne)***	‘your’ (pl.)
Third person	plural	human	anēnē	***-a-ne-ne***	‘their’

The final vowel of *=ŋu*, *=zu*, *=ane*, and *=be* contracts with the /a/ of the genitive case marker *=ak* and then becomes /a/. E.g.:

(31) **e_2 diŋir-*ra-na-ta***
e_2.j diŋir=ane =ak =ta
house god =3SG.POSS=GEN=ABL
‘out of the temple of his god’ (St B 9:15; L; 22)

These vowels usually also contract with /a/ of the locative case marker =*ʔa*, but uncontracted vowels are also found.

(32) **iri-*ŋa₂***
iri =ŋu =ʔa
city=1SG.POSS=LOC
'in my city' (St B 7:34; L; 22)

The initial /a/ of =*ane* and =*anēnē* is deleted after a vowel. E.g.:

(33) **šu-*ne-ne-a***
šu =anēnē =ʔa
hand=3PL.POSS=LOC
'on their hands' (VS 14:127 7:6; L; 24)

The form =*anēnē* 'their' comes from =*ane* 'his' and the plural marker =*enē*. It is, in fact, ambiguous and may represent =*anēnē* 'their' as in the preceding example, but may also be analysed as =*ane* 'his' followed by the plural marker =*enē*. E.g.:

(34) **dumu-*ne-ne***
dumu=ane =enē
child =3SG.POSS=PL
'his children' (NG 75 22; L; 21)

The form =*zunē* similarly comes from =*zu* 'your' and the plural marker =*enē*. The other second person plural form attested, =*zunēnē*, also contains =*zu* 'your' but is for the rest modelled on the plural pronoun =*anēnē* 'their'.

The non-human form =*be* is mostly used as a possessive pronoun, but it has two additional uses: as a demonstrative with the meaning 'this' (§46) and as a conjunction with the meaning 'and' (§123).

Further reading: DGS §8.3.

7.3. The enclitic demonstrative pronouns

§46 The enclitic demonstratives make up a three-term distance-oriented system. Depending on the dialect, the first term is either =*ʔe* or =*be* 'this' (near the speaker). The second term is =*še* 'that' (not near, but still visible to the speaker). The third is =*re* 'that' (outside the view of the speaker).

The system with =*ʔe*, we find, for example, in a Middle Babylonian Grammatical Text from Ugarit: **lu₂-*e*** 'this person', **lu₂-*še*** 'that person', **lu₂-re** 'that person (far away)' (MSL SS 1 p. 78). This system is very rare, though.

Instead of =*ʔe*, most texts have =*be*, the possessive pronoun non-human, which may also be used as a demonstrative with the meaning 'this'. E.g.:

(35) **ki lu₂-*be₂-ne-ta***
ki lu₂ =be =enē=ak =ta
place man=this=PL =GEN=ABL
'from (the place of) these men' (AUCT 3:52 4; D; 21)

(36) **alan-*ba***
alan =be =ak
statue=this=GEN
'of this statue' (FAOS 9/1 Gudea 81 2:7; L; 22)

Sumerian also has a second set of demonstratives: the independent demonstratives (see §48 below).

Further reading: DGS §8.4

8. PRONOUNS

8.1. Personal pronouns

§47 The independent personal pronouns are:

Human		***Spelling***		***Meaning***
		Long form	***Short form***	
Singular	First person	***ŋa$_2$-e***	***ŋe$_{26}$***, ***ŋa$_2$***	'I', 'me'
	Second person	***za-e***	***ze$_2$***, ***za***	'you' (sg.)
	Third person	***a-ne*** (old) > ***e-ne*** (young)		'he', 'him', 'she', 'her'
Plural	First person	***me-en-de$_3$-en***	***me-en-de$_3$***	'we', 'us'
	Second person	***me-en-ze$_2$-en***	?	'you' (pl.)
	Third person	***a-ne-ne*** (old) > ***e-ne-ne*** (young)		'they', 'them'

There is no personal pronoun non-human ('it'). Instead an independent demonstrative ('this one', 'that one', see §48) can be used.

The first and second persons singular have a long form and two short forms. The short forms /ŋa/ and /za/ are only found before case markers.

The pronoun of the second person plural is very rare and shows many different forms. The one given here is just one of them.

The third person forms with an initial /a/ are the original ones; forms with initial /e/ are Old Babylonian or later.

The third person plural ***a-ne-ne*** or ***e-ne-ne*** can be analysed as ***a-ne*** or ***e-ne*** 'he, she' followed by the plural marker *=enē*.

The independent personal pronouns are used far more rarely in Sumerian than in a language like English, because Sumerian mostly uses verbal affixes where English has pronouns. E.g.:

(37) **ki-*be$_2$* *mu-na*-gi$_4$**
ki =be =e mu -nna -n -gi$_4$
place=3NH.POSS=DIR VENT-3SG.IO-3SG.A-return:PFV
'*He* returned *it* to its place for *him*.' (Gudea 48 2:4; L; 22)

Where the English translation has three personal pronouns (in italics), the Sumerian has none. The Sumerian pronouns are used where verbal person markers are impossible or unsuitable.

Further reading: DGS §8.2. Attinger ZA 101 (2011) pp. 173-190. Edzard SG §9.1.

8.2. Demonstratives

§48 There are two sets of demonstratives in Sumerian. One set consists of the phrase-final clitics that have already been discussed above in §46. The second set consists of independent demonstrative pronouns. Grammatically the latter behave like nouns and are in the case appropriate for their grammatical function. For 'this (one)' three forms are attested: ***ne***, ***ne-e***,

and ***ne-en***. We do not know what the difference between them is. In addition we have the form ***ur$_5$***, which probably means 'that (one)'. E.g.:

(38) **u$_4$** ***ne-na ḫe$_2$-*****gaz**
u$_4$.d nēn=ʔa ḫa =i -gaz
day this=LOC MOD=VP-kill
'On this day let him be killed.' (St B 9:7; L; 22)

(39) ***ur$_5$-re*** **bara$_2$** ***ba-*****ri**
ur$_5$ =e bara$_2$.g ba -n -ri
that=ERG dais(ABS) MID-3SG.A-set.up
'That one (= Asag) set up a dais for himself.' (Lugal-e 41; OB)

Further reading: DGS §8.4.

8.3. Interrogative pronouns

§49 Sumerian has five interrogatives: ***a-na*** 'what?', ***a-ba*** 'who?', ***a-gen$_7$*** 'how?', ***me*** 'where?' and ***en$_3$*** or ***en*** 'when?'. Grammatically they behave like nouns and are in the case appropriate for their grammatical function. Their normal position in the clause is immediately before the verb, not at the beginning as in English:

(40) ***ŋe$_{26}$ a-na mu-u$_3$-da-*****zu**
ŋe$_{26}$=e a.na mu -e -da -ʔ -zu
I =ERG what(ABS) VENT-2SG-with-1SG.A-know:PFV
'What have I learned from you?' (Cyl A 9:4; L; 22)

But they are often used with the enclitic copula ***-am$_3$*** attached to them, and then they usually stand at the beginning:

(41) ***a-na-aš-am$_3$*** **u$_4$** ***mu-e-*****zal**
a.na=š =ʔam u$_4$.d mu -e -zal
what=TERM=COP:3NH.S day(ABS) VENT-2SG.A-pass
'Why did you waste time? (lit. 'It is for what you passed the day') (Ed A 23; OB)

The interrogative pronouns are used to make content questions. As in English, yes/no questions differ only in intonation from declarative clauses:

(42) **urdu$_2$ lu$_2$-*še*** **lugal-*zu-u$_3$***
urdu$_2$.d lu$_2$ =še lugal =zu
slave man=that master=2SG.POSS
'Slave! Is that man your master?' (GA 69; OB)

Further reading: DGS §8.5.

8.4. Indefinite pronoun

§50 Sumerian has a special indefinite pronoun ***na-me*** 'any'. Grammatically it behaves like an attributive adjective. It is mostly found with the nouns **lu$_2$** 'man' (**lu$_2$** ***na-me*** 'anyone'), **niŋ$_2$** 'thing' (**niŋ$_2$** ***na-me*** 'anything'), **ki** 'place' (**ki** ***na-me*** 'anywhere'), and **u$_4$.d** 'time' (**u$_4$** ***na-me*** 'ever').

Further reading: DGS §8.6.

8.5. Reflexive pronoun

§51 The Sumerian reflexive pronoun has two forms: **ni$_2$** and **ni$_2$-te** 'oneself'. It behaves grammatically like a noun and is in the case appropriate for its grammatical function. It is mostly used together with a possessive pronoun: **ni$_2$-te** together with a possessive pronoun of the third person human, **ni$_2$** with one of the other possessive pronouns:

Person	*Number*	*Class*	*Spelling*	*Meaning*
First person	singular	human	**ni$_2$-*ŋu$_{10}$***	'myself'
Second person	singular	human	**ni$_2$-*zu***	'yourself' (sg.)
Third person	singular	human	**ni$_2$-te-*ne$_2$***	'himself' or 'herself'
Third person	-	non-human	**ni$_2$-*be$_2$***	'itself' or 'themselves'
First person	plural	human	?	
Second person	plural	human	?	
Third person	plural	human	**ni$_2$-te-*ne-ne***	'themselves'

Other spellings for **ni$_2$**/**ni$_2$-te** are ***ne***/***ne*-te** and **me**/**mete**(TE+ME). E.g.:

(43) ***nam*-ti, en-mete-*na-ka-še$_3$***
nam.ti.l en ni$_2$.te=ane =ak =ak =še
life lord self =3SG.POSS=GEN=GEN=TERM
'for the life of Enmetena ("The lord of himself = His own lord")' (Ent. 1 4:6-7; L; 25)

Further reading: DGS §8.7.

9. NUMERALS

9.1. Cardinals

§52 Numerals are almost always written with logograms. As a result we do not always know their pronunciation and when we know it the information mostly comes from late texts. Like other languages Sumerian has only a few basic numerals. All others are compounds, like English *two hundred and twenty* (= 2 x 100 + 20). But whereas the numeral system of English includes basic words for 1, 10, 100, and 1000, that of Sumerian includes basic words for 1, 10, 20, 60, and 3600. Apart from 20, these also have their own logograms. That 60 is a basic number word is typical for Sumerian. No other language seems to have this.

These are the approximate forms of the individual numerals from 'one' through 'ten':

Numeral	*Form*	*Earlier form*	*Structure*
one	diš		
two	min		
three	eš		
four	limmu		
five	ja, i	*ja	
six	āš	*i-aš (?)	= 5+1 (?)
seven	umin	*i-min	= 5+2
eight	ussu		
nine	ilimmu	*i-limmu	= 5+4
ten	u	*ju	

We still do not know for certain what the numerals between 10 and 20 looked like, but these are the main and better-known numerals from 20 onwards:

Numeral	*Form*	*Earlier form*	*Explanation*
20	niš		
30	ušu	*eš-u	= 3x10
40	nimin	*niš-min	= 20x2
50	ninnu	*nimin-u	= 40+10
60	ŋešd		
120	ŋeš-min		= 60x2
240	ŋeš-limmu		= 60x4
420	ŋeš-umin	*ŋešd-umin	= 60x7
600	ŋešd-u		= 60x10
1200	ŋeš-u-min	*ŋešd-u-min	= 600x2
3600 (60x60)	šar		
36000	šar-u		= 3600x10
216000 (60x60x60)	šar-gal		= ‘big 3600’

Apart from /niš/ ‘twenty’, /ŋešd/ ‘sixty’, and /šar/ ‘3600’, all these numerals are compounds of more basic numerals. The numeral /šar/ ‘3600’ is written **šar$_2$** and is cognate with the verb **šar$_2$** ‘be numerous’ and the noun **šar$_2$** ‘circle, totality’. The numeral **šar$_2$-gal** ‘216000’ literally means ‘big 3600’.

§53 Cardinal numerals are found in three basic constructions. Firstly, a cardinal can be used attributively. It is then placed after the counted noun without any further marking other than word order:

(44) **dumu-maš 7 ^{d}*ba-u$_2$-me***
dumu.maš umin ba.u$_2$=ak =me -eš
twin seven Bau =GEN(ABS)=COP-3PL.S
‘They are Bau’s septuplets.’ (Cyl B 11:11; L; 22)

(45) **ku$_3$ giŋ$_4$ 1-*a*, siki *ma-na* 2-*ta***
ku$_3$.g giŋ$_4$ diš =ʔa siki ma.na min=ta
silver shekel one=LOC wool pound two =ABL

'with two pounds of wool per (lit. "in one") shekel of silver' (Nik 1:300 3:4-4:1; L; 24)

In administrative texts, the scribes often write the numeral before the counted noun, but this is simply a scribal convention, just as $2.00 stands for 'two dollars'.

§54 Secondly, a cardinal can be used predicatively, as the predicate of a copular clause. Here Sumerian differs from English, where a copular clause like **They are three* is not acceptable and expressions like *There are three* or *They are three in number* are used instead. E.g.:

(46) **kuš-*be*$_2$ 3-*am*$_3$**
kuš =be 3=ʔam
hide=3NH.POSS(ABS) 3=COP:3NH.S
'Its hides are three in number (lit. "Its hides are three").' (UTAMI 3:1893 obv. 2; U; 21)

This is an independent copular clause, but the same construction can also be used in a relative copular clause. Such a clause can be placed after the counted noun and provides a second method for quantifying nouns in Sumerian:

(47) **ki *nam*-erim$_2$-*še*$_3$, u$_4$ 3-*am*$_3$, *nu-um-e-re-eš***
ki nam.erim$_2$=ak =še u$_4$.d 3=ʔam nu =i -m -ʔer -eš
place oath =GEN=TERM day 3=COP:3NH.S NEG=VP-VENT-go:PLUR:PFV-3PL.S
'For three days (lit. "days which are three in number"), they did not come to the place of the oath.' (NG 209 56-58; N; 21)

(48) **a-řa_2 3-*am*$_3$, ensi$_2$-*ke*$_4$ lu$_2$ *in-ši*-gi$_4$**
a.řa_2 3=ʔam ensi$_2$.k=e lu$_2$ i -n -ši -n -gi$_4$
way 3=COP:3NH.S ruler =ERG man(ABS) VP-3SG-to-3SG.A-return:IPFV
'The governor sent three times someone to him.' (Studies Owen p. 210:7 rev. 8-9; U; 21)

§55 Thirdly, a cardinal with an enclitic pronoun attached to it can be used as an independent noun phrase in its own right:

(49) **3-*a-ne-ne*, šu *ba*-ti-*eš*$_2$**
eš -ʔa =anēnē =e šu =e ba -n -ti -eš
three-NMLZ=3PL.POSS=ERG hand=DIR 3NH.IO-3SG.A-approach-3PL
'The three of them (lit. "their three") received this (lit. "let this approach the hand").' (Nik 1:317 2:12-13; L; 24)

In this construction, the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa* (§126) is always used with the numerals /min/ 'two' and /eš/ 'three' but not with the higher numerals from /limmu/ 'four' onwards.

Further reading: DGS §§9.1-9.3.

9.2. Ordinals

§56 Old Sumerian ordinals are formed by adding the suffix *-kamma* to a cardinal, e.g. **2-*kam-ma*** '(the) second'. But later the final /ma/ of *-kamma* was lost in word-final position, so that the ordinal suffix became *-kam* in more and more forms, e.g. **2-*kam*** '(the) second'.

Further reading: DGS §9.4.

9.3. Fractions

§57 Sumerian has a few special words for fractions: **šu-ru-*a*** or **šu-ri-*a*** ‘one-half’, **šušana** ‘one-third’ (a loan from Akkadian *šušš̄an* ‘one-third’), **šanabi** ‘two-thirds’ (a loan from an older form of Akkadian *šinipu*), and **kingusila** ‘five-sixths’. Other fractions are expressed by a form of the phrase **igi-N-ŋal$_2$**, where **N** represents a cardinal. The numerator is always ‘one’, e.g., **igi-5-ŋal$_2$** ‘one-fifth’, **igi-8-ŋal$_2$** ‘one-eighth’, and so on.

Further reading: DGS §9.5.

10. ADJECTIVES

§58 Sumerian has only a few dozen primary adjectives. They express various properties and qualities, including such as have to do with dimensions (e.g., **daŋal** ‘wide’, **sig** ‘narrow’, **gal** ‘big’, **tur** ‘small’, **maḫ** ‘great’, **sukud** ‘high’), colours (**bar$_6$** ‘white, light’, **gi$_6$.g** ‘black, dark’, **su$_4$** ‘red, brown’), age (**gibil** ‘new’, **sumun** ‘old’, **libir** ‘of old, former’), values (**zi.d** ‘right, true’, **lul** ‘false’, **ḫulu** ‘bad’), and physical properties (e.g., **dugud** ‘heavy’, **du$_{10}$.g** ‘sweet, good’, **ku$_3$.g** ‘pure, holy’, **sikil** ‘clean’, **silim** ‘healthy, intact’, **sis** ‘bitter’).

The adjectives of Sumerian are very much like verbs. On the one hand, almost all adjectival stems are also found as verbal stems. On the other hand, Sumerian often uses verbs to express meanings for which it lacks special adjectives. Such verbs are, for instance, **kalag** ‘be strong’, **sa$_6$.g** ‘be beautiful’, and **gid$_2$** ‘be long’:

(50) **munus sa$_6$-*ga***
munus sa$_6$.g -ʔa
woman be.beautiful-NMLZ
‘beautiful woman (lit. “woman who is beautiful”)’ (FAOS 9/1 Gudea 8 2; L; 22)

§59 Adjectives have only two possible forms: the simple stem, without any modification, or the reduplicated stem, which involves a full repetition of the simple stem. E.g.:

(51) **diŋir gal-gal lagas^{ki}-*a-ke$_4$-ne***
diŋir gal -gal lagas =ak =enē
god big-big Lagash=GEN=PL
‘the great gods of Lagash’ (Cyl A 10:28; L; 22)

Reduplication does not apply to all adjectives in the same way. Some adjectives occur quite often with a reduplicated stem but most adjectives never or hardly ever. Also, the reduplicated form does not have the same meaning for all adjectives. With the adjectives **gal** ‘big’ and **tur** ‘small’, for instance, the reduplicated forms express plurality. If these adjectives modify a plural noun, they are reduplicated, but if they modify a singular noun, they are not.

The adjective **bar$_6$** ‘white’ is always reduplicated, regardless of whether there is any plurality involved or not. E.g.:

(52) **1 maš bar$_6$-bar$_6$**
1 maš bar$_6$ -bar$_6$
1 kid white-white
‘one white kid’ (CTNMC 3 11:3; L; 24)

Thus, the Sumerian word for ‘silver’ is **ku$_3$-babbar** or **ku$_3$-bar$_6$-bar$_6$** ‘white precious metal’, with a reduplicated adjective, regardless of whether its stem is written once (UD, transliterated as **babbar**) or twice (UD.UD, transliterated as **bar$_6$-bar$_6$** or **babbar$_2$**).

§60 Adjectives are not specified for degree, unlike in English (e.g., *big*, *bigger*, *biggest*; *beautiful*, *more beautiful*, *most beautiful*).

§61 Adjectives are found in three different constructions. Firstly and most frequently, adjectives are used attributively to modify nouns. The normal word order is then for an adjective to follow the modified noun and to precede all other parts of the noun phrase:

(53) **dub daŋal gurum$_2$-*ma-ka***
dub daŋal gurum$_2$ =ak =ʔa
tablet wide inventory=GEN=LOC
'on the broad tablet of the inventory' (DP 214 4:4; L; 24)

Secondly, some adjectives may be used as an adverb. They always stand immediately before the verb. E.g.:

(54) **gal *mu*-zu**
gal mu -n -zu
big VENT-3SG.A-know:PFV
'He knows in a big way.' (Cyl A 12:20; L; 22)

Thirdly, adjectives can be used predicatively:

(55) ***za-e* maḫ-*me-en***
za.e maḫ =me -en
you(ABS) great=COP-2SG.S
'You are great.' (Inanna C 218; OB)

This predicative use is rare, though. Usually we find a verbal form instead, with the adjective used as a verb:

(56) **nin-*al*-maḫ**
nin a -maḫ
lady(ABS) VP-be.great
'The lady is great.' (DP 111 5:7; L; 24)

Further reading: DGS chapter 10.

11. INTRODUCTION TO THE VERB

11.1. Types of verbs

§62 Just like any other language, Sumerian has a word class of verbs, but its composition differs in important ways from its English counterpart. To begin with, Sumerian has only a few hundred verbs and no grammatical means to create new ones. Instead it very often uses what we may call 'phrasal verbs': idiomatic combinations of verbs and nouns. The verb **bala** 'cross', for instance, expresses together with the noun **šu** 'hand' the meaning 'alter'. E.g.:

(57) **di ku$_5$-*a-ŋa$_2$*, šu *ni-ib$_2$*-bala-*e-a***
di.d ku$_5$.ř-ʔa =ŋu =ʔa šu ni-b -balaʔ-e -ʔa
judgement cut -NMLZ=1SG.POSS=LOC hand(ABS) in-3NH.DO-cross -3SG.A:IPFV-NMLZ
'the one who will alter the judgement passed by me (lit. "will let (his) hand go across in my cut judgement")' (St B 8:17-18; L; 22)

Other verbs similarly occur in all kinds of idiomatic combinations. Take, for example, the verb **tag** 'touch'. The phrasal verb **ŋeš—tag**, with the noun **ŋeš** 'wood' means 'sacrifice', while the phrasal verb **šu—tag**, with the noun **šu** 'hand', stands for 'decorate'. Another example is the verb **aŋ$_2$** 'measure out'. The phrasal verb **ki—aŋ$_2$**, with the noun **ki** 'place', means 'love', while **a$_2$—aŋ$_2$**, with the noun **a$_2$** 'arm, power', signifies 'order, command'. A

special case is the verb **za** ‘make the noise’, which is construed with ideophones expressing various kinds of noises, which results in combinations like ***bu-ud-ba-ad—za*** ‘clatter’.

§63 A second important difference between the verbs of Sumerian and those of English is that almost all Sumerian verbs are *labile* in a way that only a few English verbs are. Labile verbs are verbs that can be both transitive and intransitive. The Sumerian labile verbs belong to a specific type, the S=O labile verbs. For a S=O labile verb, the subject of the intransitive clause (S) is identified with the direct object of the transitive clause (O). The English verb *break* is an example: compare intransitive *The pot broke* with transitive *John broke the pot*.

English only has a small number of S=O labile verbs: e.g. *My arm hurts* vs. *I hurt my arm*, *The door opened* vs. *He opened the door*, *The time passed* vs. *They passed the time*, *The ball rolled down the hill* vs. *You rolled the ball down the hill*, and so on. In Sumerian nearly all verbs belong to this type. But because their English equivalents usually do not, Sumerian verbs have to be translated differently depending on whether they are used intransitively or transitively. E.g.:

Sumerian verb	***Translation***	
	Intransitive	***Transitive***
ak	be made	make
bala	go across	bring across
bara$_3$.g	be spread out	spread out
dab$_5$	be taken	take
dab$_6$	surround	cause to surround
dal	fly	cause to fly
e$_3$	go out	bring out
ŋar	be placed	place
gub	stand	cause to stand
kas$_4$	run	cause to run
ku$_4$.r	enter	bring in
mu$_4$.r	be worn	wear
sar	be written	write
sumun	be old	make old
ti.l	live	let live
uš$_2$	die	kill
zu	be known	know

Of course, the translations given in this table are only tentative and only illustrate possible solutions where Sumerian verbs pose translation problems: if there is no appropriate English equivalent verb available, a Sumerian transitive use can be translated as the causative of an intransitive English verb (cf. **dab$_6$**, **dal**, **gub**, **kas$_4$**, **sumun**, **ti.l**), or a Sumerian intransitive use can be translated as the passive of a transitive English verb (cf. **ak**, **bara$_3$.g**, **dab$_5$**, **ŋar**, **mu$_4$.r**, **sar**, **zu**). But all this is only a matter of translation and has nothing to do with Sumerian grammar. Only such translations are passive or causative, not the original Sumerian verbal forms.

Further reading: DGS §12.2.

11.2. Basic structure of a verbal form

§64 A Sumerian verbal form is either finite or non-finite. A finite verbal form has at least one prefix but may, at least in theory, contain up to ten different prefixes. In addition, it may have up to three suffixes. These prefixes and suffixes have a wide range of meanings and uses. They are always found in the same relative order, which can be described as a series of slots, a series of fillable positions.

This division into slots works as follows. Slot one consists of those morphemes that can only occur immediately at the beginning of the verbal form. Slot two consists of those morphemes that can only occur immediately after a morpheme of slot one, or immediately at the beginning of the verbal form if no morpheme of slot one is present. And so on. It follows that morphemes which belong to different slots can occur together in the same form, but morphemes which belong to the same slot can never do so.

In this way, we can divide the morphemes that make up Sumerian verbal forms over the following slots (see also the table in appendix D):

Slot 1: the modal proclitic *ḫa*=, the negative proclitic *nu*=
Slot 2: the vocalic prefixes, the modal and negative prefixes, the prefixes *na-* and *ši-*
Slot 3: the connective prefix *nga-*
Slot 4: the ventive prefix *mu-*
Slot 5: the initial person-prefix non-human *b-*, the prefix *ba-*
Slot 6: the initial person-prefixes human
Slot 7: the indirect-object marker
Slot 8: the prefix *da-* 'with'
Slot 9: the prefix *ta-* 'from'
Slot 10: the prefix *ši-* 'to'
Slot 11: the locative prefixes *ni-* 'in' and *e-* 'on'
Slot 12: the final person-prefixes
Slot 13: the simple or reduplicated verbal stem
Slot 14: the imperfective stem-suffix *-ed*
Slot 15: the person suffixes
Slot 16: the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa*

The following chapters will treat all these morphemes in much more detail.

§65 A finite verbal form can include morphemes from any slot but contains at least the following two morphemes:

- a prefix: in the absence of any other prefix, the form contains one from slot 2
- a verbal stem (slot 13)

Thus, the following clause contains one of the simplest Sumerian finite verbal forms possible, with just one prefix (slot 2) and the verbal stem (slot 13):

(58) **^{d}en-lil$_2$ *i$_3$*-ŋen**
en.lil$_2$ i -ŋen
Enlil(ABS) VP-go:PFV
'Enlil went' (Enlil and Ninlil 63; OB)

But most finite forms are much more complex than this. E.g.:

(59) ***u$_3$-mu-na-da*-ku$_4$-*re***
ū -mu -nna -da -n -ku$_4$.r -en
REL.PAST-VENT-3SG.IO-with-in-enter:PFV-2SG.S
'when you have entered it with this for him' (Cyl A 7:2; L; 22)

Here many more slots are filled: slot 2 (**ū**), slot 4 (**mu**), slot 6 and 7 (**nna**), slot 8 (**da**), slot 11 (**ni**), slot 13 (**ku$_4$.r**), and slot 15 (**en**).

§66 A non-finite verbal form has a much simpler structure and contains at most the following morphemes:

- the negative proclitic *nu*= (slot 1)
- the simple or reduplicated verbal stem (slot 13)
- the imperfective stem-suffix *-ed* (slot 14)
- the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa* (slot 16)

Of these four possible morphemes, only the verbal stem (slot 13) is present in all non-finite forms.

Further reading: DGS §11.2.2.

12. THE VERBAL STEM (SLOT 13-14)

§67 Sumerian has only a few hundred verbal stems and lacks the grammatical means to create new ones. There is not a single word-formation rule for creating a new verbal stem on the basis of another word.

The verbal stem can be modified through reduplication, of which there are two kinds. The first type of reduplication, a partial reduplication of the stem, is found in the imperfective forms of some verbs. The second type of reduplication, a full reduplication of the stem, indicates that the verbal form refers to a plural action or state.

There is also a stem-modifying suffix *-ed*, which indicates that the verbal form is imperfective.

12.1. Imperfective stems

§68 Some verbs have a special stem that is used in all their imperfective forms. Which verb has such a stem and which not is completely unpredictable. A few of these verbs have an imperfective stem that cannot be derived from their stem in other forms:

Verb	*Imperfective stem*	*Meaning*
du$_{11}$.g	**e** (finite), **di.d** (non-finite)	'say, do'
ŋen	**du**	'go, come'
er	**su$_8$.b**	'go, come' (plural)
ře$_6$	**tum$_3$**	'bring'
te	**te.ŋ**	'approach'

§69 Most verbs with a special stem in the imperfective have a reduplicated stem. There are at least two different reduplication patterns. One pattern follows the formula $C_1V_1C_2C_1V_1$, with C_1 being the first consonant of the unreduplicated stem, V_1 the first vowel, and so on. E.g.:

- ***ḫa-la*** 'divide': ***ḫal-ḫa*** (ipfv.)

The second pattern follows the formula $C_1V_1C_1V_1$. E.g.:

- **ŋar** 'place': ***ŋa$_2$-ŋa$_2$*** (ipfv.)

The imperfective stems of ***ḫa-la*** and **ŋar** are written with sound signs, so that we know their pronunciation. However, the scribes spell almost all reduplicated imperfective stems by simply writing the logogram twice:

- **gi$_4$** ‘return’: **gi$_4$-gi$_4$** (ipfv.)
- **ku$_4$.ř** ‘enter’: **ku$_4$-ku$_4$** (ipfv.)
- **naŋ** ‘drink’: **na$_8$-na$_8$** (ipfv.) (written: NAG.NAG)

One thing of their pronunciation is certain, though: all reduplicated imperfective stems end in a vowel.

These are the most common verbs that have a reduplicated stem in the imperfective: **ŋar** ‘place’, **gi$_4$** ‘return’, **gur$_{10}$** ‘reap’, ***ḫa-la*** ‘divide’, **kara$_2$** ‘brighten up’, **kiŋ$_2$** ‘seek’, **ku$_4$.ř** ‘enter’, **mu$_2$** ‘grow’, **naŋ** ‘drink’, **niŋin$_2$** ‘go around’, **ra** ‘hit’, **sa$_{10}$** ‘barter’, **su.g** ‘repay’, **šeš$_2$** ‘anoint’, **taka$_4$** ‘leave behind’, **te.n** ‘cool off’, **tu$_5$** ‘bathe in’, **tuku** ‘have’, **tuku$_5$** ‘weave’, **zi.g** ‘rise’.

Further reading: DGS §12.3.

12.2. The imperfective stem suffix *-ed*

§70 The imperfective stems treated above are irregular: it is unpredictable which verbs have them and which not. Sumerian also has a regular way of deriving imperfective stems, namely with the stem suffix *-ed*. The basic form of this suffix is /ed/. Its initial /e/ contracts with a preceding vowel and its final /d/ is lost except before a vowel. E.g.:

(60) **udu *la-ḫe-de$_3$***
udu laḫ$_5$ -ed =e
ram(ABS) bring:PLUR-IPFV=DIR
‘in order to bring sheep’ (CUSAS 3:260 2; G; 21)

(61) **ur-*gen$_7$* ad$_6$ gu$_7$-*u$_3$-za***
ur =gen ad$_6$ gu$_7$-ed =zu =ʔa
dog=EQU corpse(ABS) eat -IPFV=2SG.POSS=LOC
‘about your devouring a corpse like a dog’ (Inanna B 127; OB)

The suffix *-ed* is used in all non-finite imperfective forms (§§133ff.) and in most intransitive imperfective forms (§81). This is true for all verbs, including those that already have special imperfective stems. The only exception is the imperfective verb **du** ‘go, come’, which never has the suffix *-ed* in any of its forms.

12.3. Verbal number

§71 Sumerian has verbal number. This is a grammatical category found in many languages across the world, but not in European languages. Verbal number is about the singular or plural of events. Thus, verbal plurality indicates that the verb expresses an event which is in some way a plural one. Usually this means one person doing something many times, many persons doing something once, or many persons doing something many times.

§72 Sumerian has a few verbs that specify verbal number as part of their basic meanings:

gub	‘stand (singular)’
šu$_4$.g = **su$_8$.g**	‘stand (plural)’
ŋen	‘go, come (singular, perfective)’
er	‘go, come (plural, perfective)’
du	‘go, come (singular, imperfective)’
su$_8$.b	‘go, come (plural, imperfective)’
tuš	‘sit (singular)’
durun	‘sit (plural)’
ti.l	‘live (singular)’

se$_{12}$	‘live (plural)’
tum$_{2}$	‘bring (singular)’
laḫ$_{5}$	‘bring (plural)’
du$_{11}$.g	‘say, do (singular, perfective)’
e	‘say, do (plural, perfective)’
uš$_{2}$	‘die, kill (singular)’
ug$_{7}$	‘die, kill (plural)’

Take, for example, the two verbs **ti.l** ‘live (said of one person)’ and **se$_{12}$** ‘live (said of more than one person)’:

(62) **en-ig-gal, *nu*-banda$_{3}$, *e-da*-ti**
en.ig.gal nu.banda$_{3}$=d i -n -da -ti.l
Eniggal overseer =COM VP-3SG-with-live:SING
‘He lives with Eniggal, the overseer.’ (DP 115 13:13-15; L; 24)

(63) **ŋir$_{2}$-nun, *gab$_{2}$*-kas$_{4}$-*da*, *e-da*-se$_{12}$**
ŋir$_{2}$.nun gab$_{2}$.kas$_{4}$=da i -n -da -se$_{12}$
Girnun runner =COM VP-3SG-with-live:PLUR
‘They live with Girnun, the runner.’ (DP 115 13:9-11; L; 24)

§73 The singular and plural verbal stems discussed so far are irregular. Sumerian also has a regular way of forming plural verbal stems: through a full reduplication of the verbal stem, that is, by repeating the verbal stem completely. E.g.:

(64) **zi-*da* gabu$_{2}$-*na* piriŋ *i$_{3}$*-nu$_{2}$-nu$_{2}$**
zi.d -ʔa gabu$_{2}$=ane =ʔa piriŋ i -b -nu$_{2}$-nu$_{2}$
be.right-NMLZ left =3SG.POSS=LOC lion(ABS) VP-3NH:on-lie -lie
‘Lions lay on his right as well as on his left.’ (Cyl A 4:19; L; 22)

(65) **e-*ba na* du$_{3}$-*a*, *e-me*-sar-sar**
e.g =be =ʔa na du$_{3}$ -ʔa i -m -bi -n -sar -sar
dike=this=LOC stone erect-NMLZ(ABS) VP-VENT-3NH:on-3SG.A-write-write
‘He inscribed several stelas (lit. “erected stones”) on this dike.’ (Ent. 28 2:4-5; L; 24)

Further reading: DGS §12.4.

13. THE FINAL PERSON-PREFIXES (SLOT 12)

§74 The final person-prefixes are always found immediately before the verbal stem. The following table lists their basic forms:

Person	*Class*	*Final person-prefix*
First person	human	ʔ
Second person	human	e
Third person	human	n
Third person	non-human	b

The forms and spellings of these prefixes are the same as for the initial person-prefixes (§84).

In the texts from before Gudea, the prefix *ʔ-* ‘I’, ‘me’ is never written. Later, the scribes still tend to ignore it, but sometimes they spell it with a plene writing. That is to say, they spell it ***-a-*** after the vowel /a/, ***-u$_{3}$-*** after /u/, and ***-i$_{3}$-*** after /i/. E.g:

(66) ***ŋa$_{2}$-e a-na bi$_{2}$*-tuku**

ŋa$_2$.e=e a.na bi -ʔ -tuku
I =ERG what(ABS) 3NH.OO-1SG.A-have:PFV
'What did I let it have?' (Ukg. 14 2:4'; L; 24)

(67) ***nu-mu-u$_3$-gi$_4$-eš$_2$ nu-mu-u$_3$-daŋal-e-ša-a***
nu =mu -ʔ -gi$_4$ -eš nu =mu -ʔ -daŋal -eš -ʔa
NEG=VENT-1SG.A-return:PFV-3PL.DO NEG=VENT-1SG.A-be.wide-3PL.DO-NMLZ
'those that I did not turn back and that I did not disperse' (Shulgi D 217; OB)

The prefix *e-* 'you' contracts with a preceding vowel. Before the time of Gudea, it is never written. In the Gudea and Ur III texts, we often find a plene spelling:

(68) ***ma-a-*du$_{11}$**
ma -e -du$_{11}$.g
1SG.IO-2SG.A-say:PFV
'You commanded it to me.' (Cyl B 2:19; L; 22)

Old Babylonian scribes handle it again differently. They would have written this ***ma-e-*du$_{11}$**, with an explicit ***-e-***.

Because the prefixes *n-* and *b-* are syllable-final consonants, the scribes hardly ever write it before the time of Gudea and even later they leave them quite often unwritten.

§75 The final person-prefixes do not have separate singular and plural human forms. There are two basic strategies to indicate a plural where needed. One strategy only applies to the third person and involves the use of the final person-prefix non-human *b-* for referring to a plural number of persons:

(69) **ma$_2$-laḫ$_5$-*e-ne* *ib$_2$*-dab$_5$**
ma$_2$.laḫ$_5$=enē=e i -b -dab$_5$
boatman =PL =ERG VP-3NH.A-take
'The boatmen took it.' (TCL 5:5673 2:28; U; 21)

The second strategy to indicate a plural is to use a human final person-prefix together with a plural person-suffix. See §79 below for more details.

§76 The final person-prefixes have several uses. Depending on the type of verbal form (transitive or intransitive, perfective or imperfective), they express the transitive subject, the direct object, or the oblique object.

In transitive forms of the perfective, the final person-prefix always expresses the subject. E.g.:

(70) **lugal-*e* *in*-šum**
lugal=e i -n -šum
king =ERG VP-3SG.A-slaughter
'The king slaughtered them (viz. two animals).' (AUCT 3:206 5; D; 21)

In intransitive forms of the perfective and the imperfective, the final person-prefix always expresses the oblique object. E.g.:

(71) **^{ŋeš}kiri$_6$ lu$_2$-diŋir-*ke$_4$*, *ab*-us$_2$**
kiri$_6$ lu$_2$.diŋir.ra.k=ak =e a -b -ʔus$_2$
orchard Ludingira =GEN=DIR VP-3NH.OO-be.next.to
'This (plot of land) borders on Ludingira's orchard.' (TMTIM 4 17:7'-8'; I; 24)

(72) **ur-^{d}nanše-*ra*, *na-ba-an*-du$_3$**
ur.nanše =ra nan -ba -n -du$_3$ -ed
Ur.Nanshe=DAT NEG.MOD-MID-3SG.OO-hold-IPFV
'He should not hold on to Ur-Nanshe!' (AuOr 17/18 p. 224:25 7; L; 21)

In transitive forms of the imperfective, the final person-prefix is used to express the direct object. E.g.:

(73) **mu sar-*ra-ba* šu *bi$_2$-ib$_2$*-ur$_3$-*a***
mu sar -ʔa =be =ʔa šu bi -b -ʔur$_3$-e -ʔa
name write-NMLZ=this=LOC hand(ABS) 3NH:on-3NH.DO-rub -3SG.A:IPFV-NMLZ
'whoever shall efface this inscription' (St C 4:8; L; 22)

However, for the non-human prefix *b-* this usage is only optional (§82). If in a transitive imperfective form, a non-human direct object is left unexpressed, the final person-prefix can be used to express the oblique object. E.g.:

(74) **iri-*ne$_2$* u$_6$ *mu-e***
iri =ane =e u$_6$ mu -n -ʔe -e
city=3SG.POSS=ERG admiration(ABS) VENT-3SG.OO-do:IPFV-3SG.A:IPFV
'His city was admiring him.' (Cyl B 19:4; L; 22)

Further reading: DGS chapter 13.

14. THE PERSON SUFFIXES (SLOT 15)

§77 These are the basic forms of the person suffixes:

Person	*Number*	*Class*	*Person suffix*		
			Perfective	*Imperfective*	
				Intransitive	*Transitive*
First person	singular	human	en	en	en
Second person	singular	human	en	en	en
Third person	singular	human	-	-	e
Third person	-	non-human			
First person	plural	human	enden	enden	enden
Second person	plural	human	enzen	enzen	enzen
Third person	plural	human	eš	eš	enē

The forms of the third person singular human and of the third person non-human are identical: the person suffixes have here no class contrast. In this they differ from the person prefixes.

The initial /e/ of the suffixes contracts with a preceding vowel. It is retained after a consonant, but may then assimilate to the vowel of the preceding syllable. The second /e/ of *-enden* and *-enzen* may assimilate to an /a/ in the following syllable.

§78 The person suffixes are used to express the subject or the direct object in the verbal form. In intransitive forms, they always express the subject:

(75) ***nu-un*-ku$_4$-*re-en$_6$***
nu =i -n -ku$_4$.r -en
NEG=VP-in-enter:PFV-1SG.S
'I did not enter it.' (MVN 11:168 9; U; 21)

(76) ***i$_3$*-za$\underline{ḫ}$$_3$-*de$_3$-na***
i -za$\underline{ḫ}$$_3$ -ed -en -ʔa =ʔa
VP-run.away-IPFV-1SG.S-NMLZ=LOC

'when I will run away' (NRVN 1:1 7; N; 21)

In a transitive perfective form, they express the direct object:

(77) ***ab-ba-ŋu*$_{10}$ [*la-ba-r*]*a*-sa$_{10}$-*an***
ab.ba=ŋu =e nu =ba -ta -n -sa$_{10}$ -en
father=1SG.POSS=ERG NEG=MID-from-3SG.A-barter:PFV-1SG.DO
'My father did not sell me.' (NG 37 3; L; 21)

In a transitive imperfective form, they express the subject:

(78) ***u*$_3$ *ŋa*$_2$-*e* ša$_3$-*ga-ne*$_2$ *ab*-ḫul$_2$-*le-en*$_6$**
u$_3$ ŋa$_2$.e=e ša$_3$.g=ane a -b -ḫul$_2$ -en
and I =ERG heart=3SG.POSS(ABS) VP-3NH.DO-be.happy-1SG.A
'And I will make his heart happy.' (FAOS 19 Ad 8 22; A; 23)

The third person suffixes *e-* and *-enē* are only used in transitive imperfective forms and always express the subject:

(79) **e$_2$-ninnu *im-ta*-sikil-*e-ne***
e$_2$.ninnu i -m -ta -sikil -enē
Eninnu(ABS) VP-VENT-from-be.clean-3PL.A:IPFV
'They were cleaning the Eninnu with it.' (Cyl B 4:11; L; 22)

See also the table in §80 below.

§79 All person suffixes are used to express the subject or direct object, but the three plural suffixes *-enden*, *-enzen*, and *-eš* have a third use. In transitive perfective forms they are also used to express the plural of a human final person-prefix:

(80) ***i*$_3$-šum$_2$-*mu-un-de*$_3$-*en***
i -ʔ -šum$_2$-enden
VP-1SG.A-give -1PL
'we gave it' (WdO 8 p.160 7; N; 19)

(81) **me-*ŋa*$_2$ ŋeš *bi*$_2$-šub-*bu-za-na-g*[*en*$_7$]**
me =ŋu =ʔa ŋeš bi -e -šub-enzen-ʔa =gen
being=1SG.POSS=LOC wood(ABS) 3NH:on-2SG.A-fall -2PL -NMLZ=EQU
'as you people cast lots on my powers' (Lugal-e 483 ms F$_2$; OB)

(82) ***be-li*$_2$-*a-ri*$_2$-*ik*, *u*$_3$ ur-nigin$_3$-ŋar-*ke*$_4$, šu *ba-an*-ti-*eš*$_2$**
be.li$_2$.a.ri$_2$.ik u$_3$ ur.nigin$_3$.ŋar.k=e šu =e ba -n -ti -eš
Beliarik and Urnigingar =ERG hand=DIR 3NH.IO-3SG.A-approach-3PL
'Beli-arik and Urnigingar received this (lit. "let it approach (their) hand").' (PIOL 19:278 8-10; D; 21)

Further reading: DGS chapter 14.

15. THE PERFECTIVE AND IMPERFECTIVE

15.1. The perfective and imperfective inflections

§80 The verb regularly distinguishes between perfective and imperfective forms. It does so in two ways: partly by different systems of subject and object marking and partly by different stem forms. We begin with the two different systems of subject and object marking, which we will call the perfective inflection and the imperfective inflection. The following table gives an overview of the two systems:

	Perfective inflection			**Imperfective inflection**		
Transitive	***Subject***	***Stem***	***Object***	***Object***	***Stem***	***Subject***
First person singular human	ʔ		en	ʔ		en
Second person singular human	e		en	e		en
Third person singular human	n		-	n		e
Third person non-human	b			(b)		
First person plural human			enden			enden
Second person plural human			enzen			enzen
Third person plural human			eš			enē
Intransitive		***Stem***	***Subject***		***Stem***	***Subject***
First person singular human			en		(+ ed)	en
Second person singular human			en		(+ ed)	en
Third person singular human			-		(+ ed)	-
Third person non-human						
First person plural human			enden		(+ ed)	enden
Second person plural human			enzen		(+ ed)	enzen
Third person plural human			eš		(+ ed)	eš

Subject and object marking in the perfective inflection follows an ergative system. The final person-prefixes are used to mark the transitive subject, while one and the same set of person suffixes marks the direct object in transitive forms and the intransitive subject in intransitive forms.

Subject and object marking in the imperfective inflection follows partly an accusative, partly a tripartite system, depending on the category of person. The forms for the third person follow a tripartite system, with three different affixes for the three categories transitive subject, direct object, and intransitive subject. The forms for the first and second persons follow an accusative system, with one and the same set of person suffixes marking the transitive subject and the intransitive subject, while a direct object is expressed with a final person-prefix.

Several verbs have a special stem in imperfective forms (§§67ff. above), which makes it easier to recognize imperfective forms. However, such special stems are limited to a few dozen of the several hundred Sumerian verbs. For most verbs only the type of inflection makes clear which form is perfective and which imperfective.

§81 In intransitive forms, the perfective and imperfective inflections are identical. There, only a difference in stem form can distinguish between perfective and imperfective forms. For this reason, we often find the imperfective suffix *-ed* in intransitive forms:

(83) **u_4 $geme_2$-$^{d}lama_3$ *ba*-$uš_2$-*e*-*da*-*a***
u_4.d $geme_2$.$lama_3$ ba -$uš_2$-ed -ʔa =ʔa
day Geme.Lama(ABS) MID-die-IPFV-NMLZ=LOC
'when Geme-Lama dies' (NG 7 15; L; 21)

Not all intransitive imperfective forms contain the suffix *-ed*, though.

Note that the suffix *-ed* is also used in all non-finite imperfective forms (see §§133ff.). There is one systematic exception, though: the imperfective verb **du** 'go, come' never has the suffix *-ed*, not in finite nor in non-finite forms.

Further reading: DGS chapter 15.

15.2. Non-human direct-object marking in the imperfective inflection

§82 In the imperfective inflection, a non-human direct object is expressed with the final person-prefix *b*-. E.g.:

(84) **ensi$_2$, inim *bi$_2$-ib$_2$*-gi$_4$-gi$_4$-*a***
ensi$_2$.k inim bi -b -gi$_4$:RDP -e -ʔa
ruler word(ABS) 3NH:on-3NH.DO-return:IPFV-3SG.A:IPFV-NMLZ
'the ruler who will revoke the command on it' (St B 1:13-14; L; 22)

However, this use of the direct-object marker *b*- is optional and many forms lack it. E.g.:

(85) ***a-ša$_3$* lu$_2$-ga-*a-ka*, a *ḫe$_2$-en*-de$_2$-*e***
a.ša$_3$.g lu$_2$.ga=ak =ʔa a.j ḫa =i -n -de$_2$ -e
field Luga =GEN=LOC water(ABS) MOD=VP-in-pour-3SG.A:IPFV
'He must irrigate (lit. "pour water into") Luga's field.' (TCS 1:154 3-4; ?; 21)

Further reading: DGS §15.2.4.

15.3. Uses of the perfective and imperfective

§83 Perfective forms mostly express states or completed actions. Imperfective forms express actions that are not completed, usually present or future ones.

States are always expressed with perfective forms:

(86) **igi-*ŋu$_{10}$-še$_3$* dusu ku$_3$ *i$_3$*-gub**
igi =ŋu =še dusu ku$_3$.g i -gub
eye=1SG.POSS=TERM basket pure(ABS) VP-stand
'A holy basket stood in front of me.' (Cyl A 5:5; L; 22)

(87) **lugal-*ŋu$_{10}$ ḫe$_2$-en*-zu**
lugal=ŋu =e ḫa =i -n -zu
king =1SG.POSS=ERG MOD=VP-3SG.A-know:PFV
'May my king know it!' (TMHC NF 4:42 31; OB)

The perfective is also the form used to express a timeless truth:

(88) **igi ḫuš-*a-ŋu$_{10}$* kur-*re nu-um*-il$_2$**
igi ḫuš -ʔa =ŋu kur =e nu =i -m -il$_2$
eye be.angry-NMLZ=1SG.POSS(ABS) mountains=ERG NEG=VP-VENT-lift
'The mountain lands cannot bear my angry look.' (Cyl A 9:25; L; 22)

The perfective is mostly used to express a past action:

(89) **e$_2$-*zu mu-ra*-du$_3$**
e$_2$.j =zu mu -ra -ʔ -du$_3$
house=2SG.POSS(ABS) VENT-2SG.IO-1SG.A-erect
'I built your temple for you.' (Cyl B 2:21; L; 22)

The perfective is obligatory in verbal forms with the relative-past prefix *ū*- (§106) and in conditional clauses with **tukum-*be$_2$*** 'if' (§149).

The imperfective never expresses a stative meaning. A verb which can have a stative meaning in the perfective always has a non-stative one in the imperfective. The perfective forms of the verb **zu**, for example, may have the stative meaning 'know' as in ex. (87) above, but in imperfective forms it means 'come to know, learn':

(90) ***nam*-maḫ-*a-ne$_2$*, kalam-*e ḫe$_2$*-zu-zu**

nam.maḫ=ane kalam =e ḫa =i -zu:RDP -e
greatness =3SG.POSS(ABS) country=ERG MOD=VP-know:IPFV-3SG.A:IPFV
'May the country come to know his greatness!' (St B 9:29-30; L; 22)

The imperfective is mostly used to express a present or future action:

(91) **a du$_{10}$ *e-na*-de$_2$-*e***
a.j du$_{10}$.g i -nna -de$_2$ -e
water sweet(ABS) VP-3SG.IO-pour-3SG.A:IPFV
'He pours fresh water for him.' (FAOS 5/2 Luzag. 1 3:12; N; 24)

(92) **e$_2$-*zu* *ma-ra*-du$_3$-*e***
e$_2$.j =zu mu -ra -du$_3$ -en
house=2SG.POSS(ABS) VENT-2SG.IO-erect-1SG.A
'I will build your temple for you.' (Cyl A 8:18; L; 22)

The imperfective can also express a past action which is not yet completed in some way:

(93) **lu$_2$-*ra* saŋ gig-*ge* šu *mu-ŋa$_2$-ŋa$_2$***
lu$_2$ =ra saŋ gig=e šu mu -n -ŋar:RDP-e
man=DAT head ill =ERG hand(ABS) VENT-3SG.OO-place:IPFV-3SG.A:IPFV
'Headache has placed (its) hand upon a man (= He has now a headache).' (TMHC 6:1 B 2; N; 21)

(94) **sipa-*de$_3$* e$_2$ ku$_3$-*ga* *mu*-du$_3$-*e***
sipa.d =e e$_2$.j ku$_3$.g=ʔa mu -n –du$_3$ -e
shepherd=ERG house(ABS) silver=LOC VENT-in-erect-3SG.A:IPFV
'The shepherd was building the temple with (lit. "in") silver.' (Cyl A 16:25; L; 22)

(95) **dub mul-an du$_{10}$-*ga* *im-mi*-ŋal$_2$, ad *im-dab$_6$*-gi$_4$-gi$_4$**
dub mul.an=ak du$_{10}$.g=ʔa i -m -bi -n -ŋal$_2$
tablet star =GEN(ABS) knee =LOC VP-VENT-3NH:on-3SG.A-be.there:PFV

ad i -m -da -b -gi$_4$:RDP -e
sound(ABS) VP-VENT-with-3NH.DO-return:IPFV-3SG.A:IPFV
'She had a star tablet on (her) knee and was consulting it.' (Cyl A 4:26-5:1; L; 22)

Thus, both imperfective and perfective forms can express a past action, but with a difference in meaning. This difference is particularly clear with verbs of speaking. If a verb of speaking precedes the direct speech, it always has an imperfective form, because the act of speaking is not yet completed at the time talked about:

(96) **gu$_3$-de$_2$-*a*, alan-*e*, inim *im-ma*-šum$_2$-*mu***
gu$_3$.de$_2$.a=e alan =e inim i -m -ba -šum$_2$-e
Gudea =ERG statue=DIR word(ABS) VP-VENT-3NH.IO-give -3SG.A:IPFV
'Gudea gave the statue a message: "...".' (St B 7:21-23; L; 22)

If the verb of speaking follows the direct speech, it always has a perfective form:

(97) ***na-gu*** **lu$_2$-sugal$_7$-*ke$_4$* *ma-an*-bala *bi$_2$-in*-du$_{11}$**
na.gu=e lu$_2$.sugal$_7$.k=e ma -n -balaʔ bi -n -du$_{11}$.g
Nagu =ERG Lusugal =ERG 1SG.IO-3SG.A-cross 3NH.OO-3SG.A-say:PFV
'Nagu said: "Lusugal transferred it to me".' (NG 145 8'; L; 21)

Further reading: DGS §15.4.

16. THE DIMENSIONAL PREFIXES AND INITIAL PERSON PREFIXES (SLOT 5-11)

§84 The initial person-prefixes are closely associated with the 'dimensional prefixes', a term which covers all the prefixes that can occur between an initial and a final person-prefix. These dimensional prefixes are cognate with case markers and refer to participants which have roles in the event expressed by the verb.

The table below lists the basic forms and meanings of the initial person-prefixes and the dimensional prefixes. It also shows the relative order in which they occur in the verbal form. Prefixes from the same column cannot occur together in a single form, while prefixes from different columns can:

Initial person-prefix non-human	***Initial person-prefixes human***		**Dimensional prefixes**				
			Indirect-object markers	***Prefix da-***	***Prefix ta-***	***Prefix ši-***	***Locative prefixes***
Slot 5	**Slot 6**		**Slot 7**	**Slot 8**	**Slot 9**	**Slot 10**	**Slot 11**
b	1SG	**ʔ**	**(a)** 'to, for'	**da** 'with'	**ta** 'from'	**ši** 'towards'	**ni** 'in(to)'
	2SG	**e**	**(ra)** 'to, for'				**e** 'on(to)'
Prefix *ba-*	3SG	**n**					
	1PL	**mē**					
ba	2PL	**enē**					
	3PL	**nnē**					

As the table shows, a finite verbal form may, in theory, contain up to five different dimensional prefixes. In practice, such forms do not occur, but three different dimensional prefixes are sometimes found, while verbal forms with two dimensional prefixes are quite common.

No verbal form ever contains more than one initial person-prefix. Such a prefix is always used together with the dimensional prefix directly after it, so that a second and third dimensional prefix always lack a person prefix. The forms and spellings of the non-human and human singular prefixes are the same as for the final person-prefixes (§74).

The initial person-prefix *ʔ-* 'me' is never written and is so far only attested before the prefixes *da-* and *ši-*. E.g.:

(98) **kur u$_2$-sal-*la*, *ḫa-mu-da*-nu$_2$**
kur u$_2$.sal =ʔa ḫa =mu -ʔ -da -e -nu$_2$
mountains(ABS) green.meadow=LOC MOD=VENT-1SG-with-on-lie
'May the mountain land lie on green pastures with me!' (FAOS 5/2 Luzag. 1 3:22-23; N; 24)

With the indirect- and oblique-object prefixes, a form of the ventive prefix *mu-* is used instead (see §85 and §89).

The second person prefix *e-* contracts with a preceding vowel. Before the time of Gudea, it is never written. In the Gudea and Ur III texts, we often find a plene spelling:

(99) **ša$_3$-*be$_2$* *nu-mu-u$_3$-da*-zu**
ša$_3$.g=be nu =mu -e -da -ʔ -zu
heart=3NH.POSS(ABS) NEG=VENT-2SG-with-1SG.A-know:PFV
'I have not learned its meaning from you.' (Cyl A 8:22; L; 22)

Old Babylonian scribes handle it again differently. They would have written this ***nu-mu-e-da-zu***, with an explicit ***-e-***.

With the indirect- and oblique-object prefixes, a form with /r/ is used instead of *e-* (see §85 and §89).

The plural prefix *mē-* is related to the enclitic possessive pronoun *=mē* 'our' (see §45). The initial person-prefix *enē-* may come from a contraction of the singular prefix *e-* and the plural marker *=enē*. Likewise, *nnē-* may come from *n-* and the plural marker *=enē*, with loss of its initial /e/.

Further reading: DGS chapter 16.

17. THE INDIRECT-OBJECT PREFIXES (SLOT 5-7)

§85 An indirect object is expressed either by a noun phrase, or by an indirect-object prefix in the verbal form, or by both at the same time. If the indirect object is expressed by a noun phrase, the case of that phrase depends on its class: a human indirect object is in the dative case, but a non-human indirect object is in the directive case. Note that the case-marking for an indirect object is identical to that for an oblique object (§89).

In a finite verbal form, an indirect object is expressed by an indirect-object prefix (hereafter IO-prefix). The following table lists the basic forms of the IO-prefixes:

Person	*Number*	*Class*	*Basic form*	*Spelling*
First person	singular	human	ma	***ma***
Second person	singular	human	ra	***ra***
Third person	singular	human	nna	***na***
Third person	-	non-human	ba	***ba***
First person	plural	human	mē	***me***
Second person	plural	human	enē	***e-ne***
Third person	plural	human	nnē	***ne***

Here are two examples with indirect objects expressed by both a noun phrase and an IO-prefix:

(100) **e$_2$ ^{d}ŋa$_2$-tum$_3$-du$_{10}$-*ke$_4$*, izi *ba*-šum$_2$**
e$_2$.j ŋa$_2$.tum$_3$.du$_{10}$.g=ak =e izi ba -n -šum$_2$
house Gatumdu =GEN=DIR fire(ABS) 3NH.IO-3SG.A-give
'He set (lit. "gave") fire to the temple of Gatumdu.' (Ukg. 16 3:13-14; L; 24)

(101) **ensi$_2$-*ke$_4$*, geme$_2$-^{d}*ba-u$_2$-ra, e-na*-ba**
ensi$_2$.k=e geme$_2$.ba.u$_2$.k=ra i -nna -n -baʔ
ruler =ERG Gemebau =DAT VP-3SG.IO-3SG.A-portion.out
'The ruler allotted it to Geme-Bau.' (TSA 30 2:3-5; L; 24)

§86 All the IO-prefixes include an initial person-prefix, except *ma-*. That prefix is the ventive prefix *mu-* with its vowel changed to /a/ by analogy with the singular IO-prefixes human and the non-human prefix *ba-*.

The IO-prefix *ra-* may come from an earlier form **era-*, that is, the initial person-prefix *e-* 'you' and a reconstructed prefix **ra-* cognate with the dative case marker *=ra*. The IO-prefix *nna-* may similarly come from an earlier form **nra-*, that is, the initial person-prefix *n-* 'he/she' and that same reconstructed prefix *ra. Both reconstructions remain uncertain, though.

§87 If the prefix *ba-* is preceded by the ventive prefix, its /b/ assimilates to the /m/ before it:

(102) **e_2-*e* *im-ma*-ŋen**
e_2.j =e i -m -ba -ŋen
house=DIR VP-VENT-3NH.IO-go:PFV
'He came to the temple.' (Cyl A 18:8; L; 22)

The IO-prefix *ba-* may come from the initial person-prefix *b-* 'it' and a reconstructed prefix **a-* cognate with the locative case marker *=ʔa*. Functionally, however, *ba-* has nothing to do with the locative case anymore.

The prefix *ba-* has two basic uses. It is the IO-prefix for the third person non-human, which is the use we have been discussing here. Its second use is that of middle marker, which will be treated below in §101.

§88 The plural forms of the IO-prefixes are simply the initial person-prefixes, without any dimensional prefix. Very rarely, though, a dimensional prefix *a-* is added to them, by analogy with the singular and non-human IO-prefixes.

Further reading: DGS chapter 17.

18. THE OBLIQUE-OBJECT PREFIXES (SLOT 4-12)

§89 An oblique object is expressed either by a noun phrase, or by a verbal prefix, or by both at the same time. If the oblique object is expressed by a noun phrase, the case of that phrase depends on its class: a human oblique object is in the dative case, but a non-human oblique object is in the directive case. Note that the case-marking for an oblique object is identical to that for an indirect object (§85).

If an oblique object is expressed by a verbal prefix, it is either expressed by an oblique-object prefix (hereafter OO-prefix) or by a final person-prefix, as in the following table:

Person	***Number***	***Class***	***Oblique-object prefix***		***Final person-prefix***
			Basic form	***Spelling***	
First person	singular	human	(mu)	***mu***	ʔ
Second person	singular	human	ri	***ri***	e
Third person	singular	human	nni	***ni***	n
Third person	-	non-human	bi	***bi***	b
First person	plural	human	mē	***me***	?
Second person	plural	human	enē	***e-ne***	?
Third person	plural	human	nnē	***ne***	?

These forms will be discussed in more detail below (§91). An oblique object is expressed by a final person-prefix in an intransitive verbal form and in those transitive forms of the imperfective that have a non-human direct object unmarked in the verb. The former will be illustrated shortly. Here is an example of a transitive imperfective form with the oblique object expressed by a final person-prefix:

(103) **lu_2-*ra* saŋ gig-*ge* šu *mu-ŋa$_2$-ŋa$_2$***
lu_2 =ra saŋ gig=e šu mu -n -ŋar:RDP-e
man=DAT head ill =ERG hand(ABS) VENT-3SG.OO-place:IPFV-3SG.A:IPFV
'Headache has placed (its) hand upon a man (= He has now a headache).' (TMHC 6:1 B 2; N; 21)

If the verb contains already a final person-prefix expressing the subject or the direct object, the oblique object can only be expressed by an OO-prefix. However, also the OO-prefixes are not always available either, because they cannot be used together with an indirect-object prefix or one the prefixes *da-*, *ta-*, *ši-*, *e-*, and *ni-*. As a result, some oblique objects are not expressed in the verb at all.

§90 The oblique object has three basic uses. The first is to express a location with the meaning 'in(to) contact with'. The verb **us$_2$** '(cause to) be next to', for example, is always construed with such an oblique object:

(104) **diŋir-*ra-ne$_2$*, ^{d}nin-ŋeš-zi-*da*, eger-*be$_2$ ib$_2$*-us$_2$**
diŋir=ane nin.ŋeš.zi.da.k eger=be =e i -b -ʔus$_2$
god =3SG.POSS Ningishzida(ABS) back=3NH.POSS=DIR VP-3NH.OO-be.next.to
'His god Ningishzida went behind this (lit. "was next to its back").' (St G 4:8-10; L; 22)

(105) **kar niŋin$_6^{ki}$-*na-ke$_4$* ma$_2$ *bi$_2$*-us$_2$**
kar niŋin$_6$=ak =e ma$_2$ bi -n -ʔus$_2$
quay Nigin =GEN=DIR boat(ABS) 3NH.OO-3SG.A-be.next.to
'He had the boat moor at (lit. "had the boat be next to") Nigin's quay.' (Cyl A 4:4; L; 22)

(106) **^{d}en-lil$_2$-*ra*, ^{d}nin-maḫ *mu-ni*-us$_2$**
en.lil$_2$=ra nin.maḫ mu -nni -n -ʔus$_2$
Enlil =DAT Ninmah(ABS) VENT-3SG.OO-3SG.A-be.next.to
'He seated Ninmah next to Enlil.' (Cyl B 19:20-21; L; 22)

The second use is to express the causee in the causative of a transitive construction. The transitive verb **gu$_7$** 'eat (something)' may serve as an example. Its causative means 'cause (someone = the causee) to eat (something)':

(107) **u$_2$ du$_{10}$ *ḫe$_2$-ri-ib*-gu$_7$-*e***
u$_2$ du$_{10}$.g ḫa =i -ri -b -gu$_7$-e
grass good(ABS) MOD=VP-2SG.OO-3NH.DO-eat -3SG.A:IPFV
'May he let you eat good grass!' (FS A 92; OB)

(108) **^{d}en-ki-*ke$_4$* es$_3$ nibru^{ki}-*a, a-a-ne$_2$* ^{d}en-lil$_2$-*ra* niŋ$_2$ *mu-un*-gu$_7$-*e***
en.ki.k=e es$_3$ nibru =ʔa a.a =ane en.lil$_2$=ra niŋ$_2$
Enki =ERG shrine Nippur=LOC father=3SG.POSS Enlil =DAT thing(ABS)

mu -n -gu$_7$-e
VENT-3SG.OO-eat -3SG.A:IPFV
'In the shrine Nippur, Enki let his father Enlil eat something.' (ErH 104-105; ?; OB)

(109) **u$_4$ geme$_2$ dumu ^{d}nin-lil$_2$-*la$_2$-ke$_4$*, niŋ$_2$ *bi$_2$-in*-gu$_7$-*a***
u$_4$.d geme$_2$ dumu nin.lil$_2$=ak =e niŋ$_2$ bi -n -gu$_7$-ʔa =ʔa
day slave.woman child Ninlil =GEN=DIR thing(ABS) 3NH.OO-3SG.A-eat -NMLZ=LOC
'when she let the slave women and children of Ninlil eat something' (Courtesy Marcel Sigrist: RS 174 8-9; D; 21)

The third use is restricted to the human class. A verb that construes a non-human object with the locative prefix *e-* 'on' construes a human object as an oblique object. The verb **ŋar** 'place (on)' is a good example. Compare the non-human with the human construction:

(110) **lu$_2$-*ge-na* ab$_2$-*ba* inim *bi$_2$*-ŋar**
lu$_2$.ge.na=e ab$_2$ =ʔa inim bi -n -ŋar
Lugena =ERG cow=LOC word(ABS) 3NH:on-3SG.A-place:PFV

‘Lugena placed a claim on the cow.’ (NG 194 31'; L; 21)

(111) **PN_1-*ra*, PN_2 dumu PN_3-*ke_4*, inim *in-ni*-ŋar-*ra***
PN_1=ra PN_2 dumu PN_3=ak =e inim
PN_1=DAT PN_2 son PN_3=GEN=ERG word(ABS)

i -nni -n -ŋar -ʔa =ʔa
VP-3SG.OO-3SG.A-place:PFV-NMLZ=LOC
‘when PN_2, son of PN_3, placed a claim on PN_1’ (NG 89 2-4; L; 21)

§91 There is no oblique-object prefix for the first person singular. The ventive prefix *mu-* (§102ff.) is used instead. E.g.:

(112) **a naŋ-*mu-ub-ze_2-en***
a.j naŋ -mu -b -zen
water(ABS) drink-1SG.OO-3NH.DO-2PL.A
‘Let me drink water, you people!’ (Ed A 13; OB)

The OO-prefixes *ri-*, *nni-*, and *bi-* have the same forms as the IO-prefixes, except that they contain the vowel /i/ instead of /a/. This vowel /i/ is a by-form of the dimensional prefix *e-*. It alternates with /e/ according to the rule of vowel harmony in Southern Old Sumerian (§21). E.g.:

(113) **^{d}nin-*ŋir$_2$-su-ke_4*, mu *e-ne_2*-pa_3-*da-a***
nin.ŋir$_2$.su.k=e mu i -nni -n -pa_3.d-ʔa =ʔa
Ningirsu =ERG name(ABS) VP-3SG.OO-3SG.A-call -NMLZ=LOC
‘when Ningirsu had nominated him’ (Ent. 26 17-18; L; 25)

(114) **^{d}nin-*ŋir$_2$-su-ke_4*, sa-$šu_4$-gal-*ne_2*, *u_3-ni*-$šu_4$**
nin.ŋir$_2$.su.k=e sa.$šu_4$.gal =ane ū -nni -n -$šu_4$
Ningirsu =ERG large.battle.net=3SG.POSS(ABS) REL.PAST-3SG.OO-3SG.A-cover
‘after Ningirsu will have covered him with his large battle-net’ (Ent. 28 6:21-23; L; 25)

If the OO-prefix *bi-* is preceded by the ventive prefix, its /b/ assimilates to the /m/ before it:

(115) **e_2-*e im-mi*-dab_6**
e_2.j =e i -m -bi -n -dab_6
house=DIR VP-VENT-3NH.OO-3SG.A-surround
‘He had them surround the temple.’ (Cyl A 22:14; L; 22)

The plural forms of the OO-prefixes are simply the initial person-prefixes, without any dimensional prefix.

Further reading: DGS chapter 18.

19. THE PREFIXES *DA-*, *TA-*, AND *ŠI-* (SLOT 8-10)

§92 Generally speaking, a finite verbal form contains at most one of the three prefixes *da-*, *ta-*, or *ši-*. For this reason we treat them here together. But very rarely, two or even all three of them are found together in a single verbal form.

§93 The dimensional prefix *da-* ‘(together) with’ is cognate with the comitative case marker *=da* and it often refers back to a noun phrase in the comitative case. Its basic form /da/ is nearly always written ***da***. E.g.:

(116) **siki diri *mu-da*-la_2**

siki diri.g mu -e -da -b -la$_2$
wool extra(ABS) VENT-2SG-with-3NH.A-weigh
'With you (as their ruler), it produces a wool surplus.' (Cyl A 11:17; L; 22)

The /a/ of *da-* may assimilate to the vowel /i/ of the locative prefix *ni-* 'in':

(117) **^{d}en-ki-*da* e$_2$ *an-gur$_4$-ra-ka*, ša$_3$ *mu-di$_3$-ni-ib$_2$*-kuš$_2$-*u$_3$***
en.ki.k=da e$_2$.j engur =ak =ʔa ša$_3$.g
Enki =COM house Underground.Water=GEN=LOC heart(ABS)

mu -n -da -ni-b -kuš$_2$ -e
VENT-3SG-with-in-3NH.DO-trouble-3NH.A:IPFV
'They took counsel (lit. "troubled the heart") with (the god) Enki in the house of the Underground Water.' (Cyl A 22:12-13; L; 22)

§94 The dimensional prefix *ta-* 'from' is cognate with the ablative case marker *=ta*. Its basic form /ta/ is written ***ta***. It often refers back to a noun phrase in the ablative case. E.g.:

(118) **kur *ma$_2$-gan^{ki}-ta*, ^{na4}esi *im-ta*-e$_{11}$**
kur ma$_2$.gan=ta esi i -m -ta -n -e$_{11}$.d
mountains Magan =ABL diorite(ABS) VP-VENT-from-3SG.A-go.up/down
'He brought down diorite out of the mountain land Magan.' (St A 2:6-3:1; L; 22)

For the absence of the initial person-prefix *b-* is this form, see §104 below.

The /t/ of *ta-* becomes /r/ after the vowel /e/ or /a/. E.g.:

(119) **iti-*ta* u4 22 *ba-ra*-zal**
iti.d =ta u$_4$.d 22 ba -ta -zal
month=ABL day 22(ABS) MID-from-pass
'Out of the month, day 22 had passed.' (AUCT 1:686 10; D; 21)

§95 The dimensional prefix *ši-* 'towards' is cognate with the terminative case marker *=še* and often refers back to a noun phrase in the terminative case. Its basic form /ši/ is written ***ši***. It can usually be translated with 'to ...' or 'for ...'. E.g.:

(120) **gu$_3$-de$_2$-*a* en ^{d}nin-*ŋir$_2$-su-ke$_4$*, igi zi *mu-ši*-bar**
gu$_3$.de$_2$.a=š en nin.ŋir$_2$.su.k=e igi zi.d mu -n -ši-n -bar
Gudea =TERM lord Ningirsu =ERG eye right(ABS) VENT-3SG-to-3SG.A-be.out
'Lord Ningirsu directed his gaze approvingly to Gudea.' (Cyl A 23:16-17; L; 22)

The vowel of *ši-* alternates between /e/ and /i/ in Southern Old Sumerian according to its rule of vowel harmony (§21). E.g.:

(121) **igi-*ŋu$_{10}$-an-še$_3$*-ŋal$_2$** (a proper name)
igi =ŋu a -n -ši -ŋal$_2$
eye=1SG.POSS(ABS) VP-3SG-to-be.there:PFV
'My eyes are towards him.' (DP 115 3:13; L; 24)

(122) ***ḫe$_2$-na-ši*-gub**
ḫa =i -nna -ši-gub
MOD=VP-3SG.IO-to-stand
'May he stand before him for it!' (Ent. 28 6:8; L; 25)

Further reading: DGS chapter 19.

20. THE LOCATIVE PREFIXES (SLOT 11)

§96 A finite verbal form may contain one of the two locative prefixes *ni-* 'in' or *e-* 'on'. The table below shows how they appear in various types of verbal forms:

	with initial person-prefix		without initial person-prefix	
	not before stem	*before stem*	*not before stem*	*before stem*
'in'	–	–	ni	n
'on'	bi	b	–	e

Thus, the locative prefix *ni-* is never used with an initial person-prefix and has a different form depending on whether it is immediately before the verbal stem or not. The locative prefix *e-* shows a wider variety of forms, but is completely absent from one type of form.

Either locative prefix can refer back to a noun phrase in the locative case, because the locative case expresses both the meanings 'in' and 'on'. E.g.:

(123) **kisal e$_2$-ninnu-*ka, mu-na-ni*-du$_3$**
kisal e$_2$.ninnu=ak =ʔa mu -nna -ni-n -du$_3$
courtyard Eninnu =GEN=LOC VENT-3SG.IO-in-3SG.A-erect
'He erected them (viz. a number of stelas) for him in the courtyard of the Eninnu.' (St B 6:11-12; L; 22)

(124) **ki-*ba na bi$_2$*-du$_3$**
ki =be =ʔa na bi -n -du$_3$
place=this=LOC stone(ABS) 3NH:on-3SG.A-erect
'He erected a stela on this place.' (Ent. 28 1:12; L; 25)

§97 The locative prefix *ni-* 'in' is never used together with an initial person-prefix. Its basic form is /ni/, which is only found immediately before a final person-prefix. If there is no final person-prefix, *ni-* has the reduced form /n/, which is only found immediately before the verbal stem:

(125) **kalam-*ma* igi *mi-ni-ib$_2$*-ŋal$_2$**
kalam =ʔa igi mu -ni-b -ŋal$_2$
country=LOC eye(ABS) VENT-in-3NH.A-be.there:PFV
'It let its eye be in the country.' (Cyl A 27:4; L; 22)

(126) **^{ŋeš}*u$_3$*-šub-*ba ma-an*-ŋal$_2$**
u$_3$.šub =ʔa ma -n -ŋal$_2$
brick.mould=LOC 1SG.IO-in-be.there:PFV
'It was in the brick mould for me.' (Cyl A 5:7; L; 22)

The vowel of /ni/ alternates between /i/ and /e/ according to the rule of vowel harmony in Southern Old Sumerian (§21) but this is not visible in the spelling, because the two forms are written with the same cuneiform sign NI, which can be read as ***ni*** or ***ne$_2$***.

§98 The prefix *ni-* means 'in it' or 'into it' and usually expresses a location. But it can also refer to the material that is used for making something. E.g.:

(127) **ur$_2$-*be$_2$* na$_4$-*a mu-na-ni*-du$_3$**
ur$_2$ =be na$_4$ =ʔa mu -nna -ni-n -du$_3$
foundation=3NH.POSS(ABS) stone=LOC VENT-3SG.IO-in-3SG.A-erect
'He built its foundation for him in stone.' (Ent. 28 5:13; L; 25)

§99 The dimensional prefix *e-* occurs in two different sets of forms. Firstly, it appears in the oblique-object prefixes *ri-*, *nni-*, and *bi-*, which have been discussed above (§§89ff.). Secondly, it is found as the locative prefix *e-* 'on', which is treated here.

§100 The locative prefix *e-* has two basic forms, one with and one without the initial person-prefix non-human *b-*: /bi/ and /e/. These two basic forms may undergo changes.

Combined with the initial person-prefix non-human *b-*, the locative prefix *e-* has the basic form /bi/, which is usually written ***bi₂***:

(128) **^{d}en-lil₂-*le*, absin₃-*na-na*, mun *ḫa-bi₂*-zi-zi**
en.lil₂=e absin₃=ane =ʔa mun ḫa =bi -b -zi.g:RDP-e
Enlil =ERG furrow=3SG.POSS=LOC salt(ABS) MOD=3NH:on-3NH.DO-rise:IPFV -3SG.A:IPFV
'May Enlil have salt come up on his furrows!' (Ean. 63 3:4-6; L; 25)

The vowel of /bi/ alternates between /i/ and /e/ according to the rule of vowel harmony in Southern Old Sumerian (§21). Compare the preceding with the following example:

(129) **e₂.gal *ti-ra-aš₂-ka* šu *be₂*-bad**
e₂.gal ti.ra.aš₂=ak =ʔa šu bi -n -bad
palace Tirash =GEN=LOC hand(ABS) 3NH:on-3SG.A-open
'He plundered (lit. "opened the hand on") the palace of Tirash.' (Ukg. 16 1:8-9; L; 24)

If /bi/ is preceded by the ventive prefix, the /b/ of /bi/ assimilates to the /m/ before it:

(130) **ma₂-gur₈-*ra-na* ŋiri₃ *nam-mi*-gub**
ma₂.gur₈=ane =ʔa ŋiri₃ na -m -bi -n -gub
ship =3SG.POSS=LOC foot(ABS) PFM-VENT-3NH:on-3SG.A-stand
'He truly stepped (lit. "had the foot stand") on his ship.' (Cyl A 2:4; L; 22)

This form /bi/ is only found immediately before a final person-prefix, just like the form /ni/ of the locative prefix *ni-*. If there is no final person-prefix, /bi/ has the reduced form /b/, which is only found immediately before the verbal stem:

(131) **ki lu₂-^{d}en-lil₂-*la₂-ka* *i₃-ib₂*-ŋal₂**
ki lu₂.en.lil₂.la₂.k=ak =ʔa i -b -ŋal₂
place Lu'enlilla =GEN=LOC VP-3NH:on-be.there:PFV
'This is on the place of Lu-Enlilla.' (BCT 2:111 5; U; 21)

The basic form /bi/ and its reduced form /b/ are only found when the verbal form does not contain any other dimensional prefix. If the verbal form contains another dimensional prefix but lacks a final person-prefix, the locative prefix *e-* has the basic form /e/. It contracts with a preceding vowel, which may or may not be written plene:

(132) **ma₂ gala-tur-*ka*, *ba*-ŋar**
ma₂ gala.tur=ak =ʔa ba -e -ŋar
boat Galatur =GEN=LOC MID-on-place:PFV
'This (bitumen) was loaded on Galatur's boat.' (DP 346 1:2-3; L; 24)

(133) **ma₂-*a* *ba-a*-ŋar**
ma₂=ʔa ba -e -ŋar
boat=LOC MID-on-place:PFV
'They (=slaughtered animals) were placed on a boat.' (SACT 1:171 7; D; 21)

Old Babylonian scribes usually write the /e/ explicitly and would have written this form ***ba-e*-ŋar**.

The locative prefix *e-* cannot be used in verbal forms that contain a final person-prefix as well as a dimensional prefix other than *e-*.

Further reading: DGS chapter 20.

21. THE PREFIX *BA-* AS A MIDDLE MARKER (SLOT 5)

§101 As we saw above in §85, the prefix *ba-* is used to express a non-human indirect object. But the prefix has a number of additional uses that belong to the linguistic realm of middle marking. So far, three such uses can be identified.

The first middle use of *ba-* is that of indirect reflexive. It then indicates that the verb has an indirect object which refers to the same person or thing as the subject:

(134) **kur-kur *e-ma-ḫuŋ***
kur -kur i -m -ba -n -ḫuŋ
mountains-mountains(ABS) VP-VENT-MID-3SG.A-hire
'He hired the foreign lands for himself.' (Ent. 28 3:1; L; 25)

(135) ***i$_3$-na-ze$_2$-er-e*, *ba-ab*-tum$_2$-*mu***
i$_3$.na.ze$_2$.er=e ba -b -tum$_2$-e
Inazer =ERG MID-3NH.DO-bring-3SG.A:IPFV
'Inazer will take it (= a donkey) away (lit. "will bring it to himself").' (BPOA 1:1285 9-10; U; 21)

The second middle use of *ba-* is that of expressing a change of state. It then mostly means something like 'come to be ...' or 'become ...''.

(136) ***ba*-ug$_7$-*ge-eš$_2$***
ba -ug$_7$ -eš
MID-die:PLUR-3PL.S
'They have died ("became dead").' (Nik 1:7 1:4; L; 24)

(137) **e$_2$ *a-ba*-sumun**
e$_2$.j ū -ba -sumun
house(ABS) REL.PAST-MID-be.old
'after the temple has become old' (FAOS 9/2 Amarsuen 12 32; Ur; 21)

Similarly, **tuku** 'have' with the prefix *ba-* means 'get, acquire ("come to have")', **tuš** 'sit' with *ba-* 'sit down', and **nu$_2$** 'lie' with *ba-* 'lie down'.

The third and most common middle use of *ba-* is that of a passive marker. Compare these two year names, the first active and without *ba-*, the second passive and with *ba-*:

(138) **mu ^{d}amar-^{d}suen lugal-*e* *ur-bi$_2$-lum^{ki}* *mu*-ḫulu**
mu amar.suen lugal=e ur.bi$_2$.lum mu -n -ḫulu
year Amarsuen king =ERG Urbilum(ABS) VENT-3SG.A-destroy
'The year: Amarsuen, the king, destroyed Urbilum.' (AUCT 1:70 7; D; 21)

(139) **mu *ur-bi$_2$-lum^{ki}* *ba*-ḫulu**
mu ur.bi$_2$.lum ba -ḫulu
year Urbilum(ABS) MID-destroy
'The year: Urbilum was destroyed.' (AUCT 1:883 7; D; 21)

Until the Ur III period, this passive use of *ba-* is only found in the Southern Sumerian dialect.

Further reading: DGS chapter 21.

22. THE VENTIVE PREFIX (SLOT 4)

§102 The ventive prefix is *mu-*. Its basic form is /mu/:

(140) ***mu-ne*-du$_3$**
mu -nnē -n -du$_3$
VENT-3PL.IO-3SG.A-erect
'He built it for them.' (Ent. 74 3:2; L; 25)

The /u/ is lost in the sequence /muCV/, that is, if followed by a consonant and a vowel. We then find the reduced form /m/:

(141) **lugal ki-en-gi-*še$_3$, i$_3$-im*-ŋen-*na-a***
lugal ki.en.gi.r=še i -m -ŋen -ʔa =ʔa
king(ABS) Sumer =TERM VP-VENT-go:PFV-NMLZ=LOC
'when the king came to Sumer' (SPTWML 42 rev 13-14; U; 23)

(142) **e$_2$-*e im-ma*-ŋen**
e$_2$.j =e i -m -ba -ŋen
house=DIR VP-VENT-3NH.IO-go:PFV
'He came to the temple.' (Cyl A 18:8; L; 22)

Before the indirect-object prefix *ra-*, the oblique-object prefix *ri-*, and the locative prefix *ni-*, however, the /u/ is always retained but may assimilate to the vowel of the following syllable:

(143) **ŋi$_6$-*e ma-ra-ab*-mu$_2$-mu$_2$**
ŋi$_6$ =e mu -ra -b -mu$_2$:RDP-e
night=ERG VENT-2SG.IO-3NH.DO-grow:IPFV -3NH.A:IPFV
'The night will let it grow for you.' (Cyl A 12:2; L; 22)

This assimilation only happens if the /u/ is in the first syllable of the form. If it is in the second syllable, the /u/ never changes:

(144) **e$_2$-*zu ga-mu-ra*-du$_3$**
e$_2$.j =zu ga -mu -ra -du$_3$
house=2SG.POSS(ABS) MOD:1SG.A-VENT-2SG.IO-erect
'I will build your temple for you!' (Cyl A 2:14; L; 22)

§103 The ventive prefix expresses more or less the same meanings as the English adverbs 'here' and 'hither' (= 'to here'). If there is any movement involved, the ventive prefix means 'in the direction of the speaker', 'nearer to the speaker', 'hither'. This is particularly clear with motion verbs. While English has different words to express the distinction between 'go' and 'come' and between 'bring' and 'take away', Sumerian makes such distinctions with the ventive prefix. Thus, the verb **ŋen** means 'go' without the ventive prefix but 'come' with it. The same principle applies to other motion verbs: **e$_3$** 'go/come out', **e$_{11}$.d** 'go/come up/down', and **ře$_6$** 'bring/take away'.

If there is no movement involved, the ventive prefix simply expresses a certain nearness to the speaker. This 'nearness' can be purely spatial. The prefix then means 'here'. But this nearness to the speaker can also be more abstract. It then expresses merely an involvement of the speaker in the action expressed by the verb. We then usually leave it untranslated by lack of a suitable translation.

A form of the ventive prefix is also used to express an indirect or oblique object of the first person. See §86 for the IO-prefix *ma-* and see §91 for *mu-* as an OO-prefix.

§104 In certain types of finite verbal forms, the non-human person-prefix *b-* can immediately follow the ventive prefix, while in others it cannot. Thus, the initial person-prefix non-human *b-* is never used between the ventive prefix and one of the prefixes *da-*, *ta-*, or *ši-*. E.g.:

(145) **e$_2$-*da* lugal *im-da*-ḫul$_2$**

e$_2$.j =da lugal i -m -da -ḫul$_2$
house=COM master(ABS) VP-VENT-with-be.happy
'The owner was happy with the house.' (Cyl B 20:14; L; 22)

Likewise, the final person-prefix *b-* is normally not used between the ventive prefix and the verbal stem. E.g.:

(146) ***me-lam$_2$* ḫuš-*be$_2$* an-*ne$_2$* *im*-us$_2$**
me.lam$_2$ ḫuš =be an =e i -m -ʔus$_2$
radiance fierce=3NH.POSS(ABS) heaven=DIR VP-VENT-be.next.to
'Its awesome radiance reaches heaven.' (Cyl A 9:16; L; 22)

But if the ventive prefix is used to express an indirect or oblique object of the first person, the final person-prefix *b-* can be used between the ventive prefix and the stem. E.g.:

(147) **niŋ$_2$ maš ŋi$_6$-*ke$_4$* *ma-ab*-ře$_6$-*a-ŋa$_2$***
niŋ$_2$ maš ŋi$_6$ =ak =e ma -b -ře$_6$ -ʔa =ŋu =ak
thing omen night=GEN=ERG 1SG.IO-3NH.A-bring:PFV-NMLZ=1SG.POSS=GEN
'of the thing that the omen of the night brought me' (Cyl A 1:27; L; 22)

(148) **a naŋ-*mu-ub-ze$_2$-en***
a.j naŋ -mu -b -zen
water(ABS) drink-1SG.OO-3NH.DO-2PL.A
'Let me drink water, you people!' (Ed A 13; OB)

Further reading: DGS chapter 22.

23. THE VOCALIC PREFIXES (SLOT 2)

§105 This chapter discusses those prefixes which, for lack of an already established name, I have dubbed the vocalic prefixes. There are three of them: the relative-past prefix *ū-*, the prefix *a-*, and the prefix *i-*. They are always the first prefix of the verbal form, except the prefix *i-*, which can be preceded by one of the proclitics *nu=* and *ḫa=*.

23.1. The relative-past prefix *ū-*

§106 The prefix *ū-* is only found in perfective forms. A verbal form with the prefix *ū-* is subordinate to the following verb and expresses an anterior action. A clause with such a form can usually be translated into English with a temporal clause introduced by 'when' or 'after'.

The basic form of the prefix *ū-* is /ū/, with a long vowel, as is shown by the many plene spellings from the Ur III period and later:

(149) **lu$_2$ inim-*ma-ke$_4$* *nam*-erim$_2$-*be$_2$* *u$_3$-ub*-ku$_5$**
lu$_2$ inim=ak =e nam.ʔerim$_2$=be ū -b -ku$_5$.ř
man word=GEN=ERG oath =3NH.POSS(ABS) REL.PAST-3NH.A-cut
'when the witnesses take an oath about this' (NG 215 45; U; 21)

If the prefix *ū-* occurs immediately before the stem, that is, when it is the only verbal prefix, an /l/ is inserted between it and the stem:

(150) **šuku-*be$_2$* *u$_3$-ul*-gid$_2$**
šuku.ř =be ūl -gid$_2$
prebend=3NH.POSS(ABS) REL.PAST-survey
'after their prebendal lands have been surveyed' (NG 215 3; U; 21)

In an open syllable, the vowel of the prefix *ū-* is shortened and assimilates to the vowel of the following syllable:

(151) **ŋiri$_3$-*ŋu$_{10}$* ki *i$_3$-bi$_2$*-us$_2$**
ŋiri$_3$=ŋu$_{10}$ ki =e ū -bi -ʔ -ʔus$_2$
foot =1SG.POSS(ABS) earth=DIR REL.PAST-3NH.OO-1SG.A-be.next.to
'when I have directed my steps' (Cyl A 11:21; L; 22)

(152) ***a-ba*-pa$_3$, *ze-re-dam***
ū -ba -pa$_3$.d ze.r -ed =ʔam
REL.PAST-MID-find destroy-IPFV=COP:3NH.S
'When it (viz. a sealed document gone missing) is found, it is to be destroyed.' (NRVN 1:244 6-7; N; 21)

(153) **pisaŋ-*ŋa$_2$* *u$_3$-mu-ni-ŋa$_2$-ar***
pisaŋ =ʔa ū -mu -ni-n -ŋar
basket=LOC REL.PAST-VENT-in -3SG.A-place:PFV
'when he has placed them in a basket' (TCS 1:290 4; U; 21)

Further reading: DGS §24.2.

23.2. The prefixes *i-* and *a-*: forms

§107 The prefixes *i-* and *a-* have the basic forms /i/ and /a/:

(154) ***in-na-an*-šum$_2$**
i -nna -n -šum$_2$
VP-3SG.IO-3SG.A-give
'He gave it to him.' (NRVN 1:57 7; N; 21)

(155) ***i$_3$-lum-ba-ni*, *an-da*-ŋal$_2$**
i$_3$.lum.ba.ni=d a -n -da -ŋal$_2$
Ilumbani =COM VP-3SG-with-be.there:PFV
'This is with Ilum-bani.' (ECTJ 104 3:6-7; N; 24)

But they are lost in an open syllable before the prefixes *mu-*, *bi-*, and *ba-*. E.g.:

(156) **u$_2$-*še$_3$* *im-ši*-ŋen-*na***
u$_2$ =še i -m -ši-ŋen -ʔa
hay=TERM VP-VENT-to-go:PFV-NMLZ
'who came for hay' (SAT 1:135 4; L; 21)

(157) ***šar-um-i$_3$-li$_2$-še$_3$ mu-ši*-ŋen-*na***
šar.um.i$_3$.li$_2$=še mu -n -ši -ŋen -ʔa
Sharrum.ilī =TERM VENT-3SG-to-go:PFV-NMLZ
'who came for Sharrum-ilī' (MTBM 45 2; L; 21)

In Southern, but not in Northern, Sumerian, they are also lost before the form /ni/ of the prefix *ni-*.

If the prefix *a-* occurs immediately before the stem, an /l/ is inserted between it and the stem:

(158) **ša$_3$-gal lu$_2$ *al*-dab$_5$-*ba-ne***
ša$_3$.gal lu$_2$ al -dab$_5$-ʔa =enē=ak
fodder man VP-take -NMLZ=PL =GEN

‘fodder for the captives (lit. “of the men who have been taken (captive)”)’ (UMTBM 2:87 rev 3; U; 21)

The vowel of the prefix *i-* alternates between /i/ and /e/ according to the Old Sumerian rule of vowel harmony (§21):

(159) **saŋŋa *e*-me-*a***
saŋŋa i -me-ʔa =ʔa
administrator(ABS) VP-COP-NMLZ=LOC
‘when he was administrator’ (CT 50:26 3:6; L; 24)

(160) **en-ig-gal, *nu*-banda$_3$, *i$_3$*-du$_3$**
en.ig.gal nu.banda$_3$=e i -n -du$_3$
Eniggal overseer =ERG VP-3SG.A-erect
‘Eniggal, the overseer, built it.’ (DP 643 6:2-4; L; 24)

Further reading: DGS §24.3.

23.3. The prefixes *i-* and *a-*: uses

§108 At some point in time, the prefixes *i-* and *a-* were lost before several prefixes with the structure /CV/. This change obviously obliterated any functional difference these two prefixes may have had in such forms. What happened next differs according to dialect. In Southern Sumerian the use of the prefix *i-* greatly expanded at the expense of *a-*, whereas in Northern Sumerian the prefix *a-* held its ground, acquiring the new function of passive marker.

In perfective forms, the prefix *a-* has a stative meaning in both dialects:

(161) ***a-ba*-^{d}utu-*gen$_7$-e*, *an-da*-tuku**
a.ba.utu.gen$_7$=e a -n -da -n -tuku
Aba'utugen =ERG VP-3SG-with-3SG.A-have:PFV
‘He owes this to Aba'utugen (lit. “Aba'utugen has this with him”).’ (OIP 14:192 4-5; A; 23)

(162) **an en-*nam* sul-*le-eš$_2$* *al*-gub**
an en =ʔam sul =eš al -gub
heaven(ABS) lord(ABS)=COP:3SG.S youth=ADV VP-stand
‘Heaven was lord; he stood as a young man.’ (Ukg. 15 2:1; L; 24)

But in Southern Sumerian, the prefix *a-* is increasingly replaced by *i-* in such forms:

(163) **zi-*ŋu$_{10}$-an-da*-ŋal$_2$** (a proper name)
zi =ŋu a -n -da -ŋal$_2$
life=1SG.POSS(ABS) VP-3SG-with-be.there:PFV
‘My life is with him.’ (CT 50:36 4:15; L; 24)

(164) **zi-*ŋu$_{10}$-in-da*-ŋal$_2$** (a proper name)
zi =ŋu i -n -da -ŋal$_2$
life=1SG.POSS(ABS) VP-3SG-with-be.there:PFV
‘My life is with him.’ (TuT 164-15 5:11; L; 21)

In Northern Sumerian, the prefix *a-* remained in full use and even received a completely new function: that of passive marker:

(165) ***a-ne-da*, ugula e$_2$-sikil-*ra*, *an-na*-šum$_2$**
a.nē.da ugula e$_2$.sikil=ak =ra a -nna -n -šum$_2$
Aneda foreman Esikil =GEN=DAT VP-3SG.IO-SG.A-give

‘This was given to Aneda, the foreman of the Esikil.’ (ECTJ 47 2-4; N; 24)

In Northern Sumerian, the active form has the prefix *i-* instead of *a-*:

(166) ***su-mu-*^{d}NIRAḪ*-e*, lugal-an-*na*-tum$_2$-*ra*, *i$_3$-na*-šum$_2$**
su.mu.niraḫ=e lugal.an.na.tum$_2$=ra i -nna -n -šum$_2$
Sumu.Nirah =ERG Lugal'annabtum =DAT VP-3SG.IO-SG.A-give
‘Sumu-Nirah gave this to Lugal'annabtum.’ (MVN 3:25 13-15; I; 23)

Note that Southern Sumerian uses the prefix *ba-* as its passive marker (§101).

The use of *i-* and *a-* in imperfective forms is less clear. Such forms mostly have the prefix *a-*, but, here too, the prefix *a-* is replaced by *i-* in Southern Sumerian.

Both dialects have only the prefix *a-* in imperative forms, never *i-*. See §111.

Further reading: DGS §§24.4-6.

24. THE MODAL AND NEGATIVE FORMS (SLOT 1-2)

§109 Sumerian has three negations: *nu=*, *na(n)-*, and *bara-*. The last two also have a modal meaning. While *nu=* negates statements, the prefix *na(n)-* negates wishes, requests, or commands, and the prefix *bara-* negates assertions. In addition, Sumerian has three kinds of positive modal forms: the imperative and the verbal forms which begin with the prefixes *ga-* and *ḫa=*.

Further reading: DGS §25.1.

24.1. The negative proclitic *nu=*

§110 The proclitic *nu=* negates non-modal verbal forms: it is used in negative statements or questions. E.g.:

(167) **niŋ$_2$ *na-me nu-mu-da-a*-tuku**
niŋ$_2$ na.me nu =mu -ʔ -da -e -tuku
thing any(ABS) NEG=VENT-1SG-with-2SG.A-have:PFV
‘I do not owe you anything (lit.“You do not have anything with me”).’ (SNAT 535 obv 13; U; 21)

It also negates non-finite verbal forms (§§129ff.).

Because *nu=* can precede the prefix *i-*, it is a proclitic element: it is attached to the front of the verbal form it negates. If the finite verbal form begins with the prefix *i-*, the /u/ of *nu=* contracts with *i-*, becoming /ū/. From about the time of Gudea onwards, this /ū/ is often explicitly written with a plene spelling ***nu-u$_3$-***. E.g.:

(168) **tukum-*be$_2$*, *nu-u$_3$-um*-ŋen**
tukum.be nu =i -m -ŋen
if NEG=VP-VENT-go:PFV
‘if he does not come’ (RA 73 p.26:2 7-8; L; 21)

In forms without *i-*, the /u/ of *nu=* may assimilate to the vowel of the following syllable:

(169) **1-*am$_3$* lu$_2$ *na-ma*-šum$_2$**
1=ʔam lu$_2$ =e nu =ma -n -šum$_2$
1=COP:3NH.S man=ERG NEG=1SG.IO-3SG.A-give
‘Nobody gave me one.’ (TCS 1:147 4; U; 21)

The proclitic *nu=* becomes /la/ before the prefix *ba-* and /li/ before the prefix *bi-*:

(170) **usan$_3$ *la-ba*-sag$_3$**
usan$_3$ nu =ba -sag$_3$
whip(ABS) NEG=MID-strike
'No whip-lashing took place (lit. "The whip was not struck").' (St B 4:10; L; 22)

This /la/ is written explicitly from the Old Akkadian period onwards and /li/ from the Ur III period onwards. Earlier texts have only ***nu-***.

Further reading: DGS §25.2.

24.2. The imperative

§111 The imperative expresses a direct command to the addressee. It is only found with a subject of the second person. An imperative form consists of a verbal stem with the prefixes positioned after the stem instead of before. Compare:

(171) ***in-na-an*-du$_{11}$**
i -nna -n -du$_{11}$.g
VP-3SG.IO-3SG.A-say:PFV
'He said it to him.' (NRVN 1:59 6; N; 21)

(172) **du$_{11}$-*ga-na***
du$_{11}$.g -a -nna -b
say:PFV-VP-3SG.IO-3NH.OO
'Say it to him!' (Nik 1:177 3:1; L; 24)

Three properties are typical for imperative forms. First, the prefixes appear as suffixes in the imperative form. This is like French, where the imperative *dis-le-moi!* has a counterpart in *tu me le dis*. Second, imperatives have the vocalic prefix *a-* where non-imperative forms have *i-*. Third, imperatives are hybrid forms: their stems are as in perfective forms but their inflection is as in the imperfective. Thus, a final person-prefix is used to designate the direct object:

(173) **gi$_4$-*mu-un***
gi$_4$ -mu -n
return:PFV-VENT-3SG.DO
'Send him to me!' (TCS 1:149 9; ?; 21)

A singular imperative form lacks a person suffix for expressing the subject. Imperatives are always second person, so that the subject is already clear. Thus, an imperative has a transitive or an intransitive subject of the second person:

(174) **ku$_3$-*ŋu$_{10}$* šum$_2$-*ma-ab***
ku$_3$.g=ŋu šum$_2$-ma -b
silver=1SG.POSS(ABS) give -1SG.IO-3NH.DO
'Give me my silver!' (NATN 493 3; N; 21)

(175) **ŋen-*na***
ŋen -a
go:PFV-VP
'Go!' (Shulgi X 90; OB)

Imperative forms with a plural subject have a suffix *-zen* after the series of suffixed prefixes:

(176) **du$_{11}$-*ga-na-ab-ze$_2$-en***

du$_{11}$.g -a -nna -b -zen
say:PFV-VP-3SG.IO-3NH.OO-2PL.A
'You people, say it to her!' (Inanna's Descent 241; OB)

The imperative cannot be negated. A form with the negative modal prefix *na(n)-* is used instead (§115).

Further reading: DGS §25.3.

24.3. The modal proclitic *ḫa=*

§112 In the Old Sumerian and early Old Akkadian period, *ḫa=* has two different forms and spellings. Their use follows clear rules and is completely predictable. Its basic form is /ḫa/, which is always written ***ḫa***. If it precedes the prefix *i-*, the two prefixes contract, becoming /ḫē/, which is written ***ḫe$_2$***:

(177) **^{d}en-lil$_2$-*le*, absin$_3$-*na-na*, mun *ḫa-bi$_2$*-zi-zi**
en.lil$_2$=e absin$_3$=ane =ʔa mun
Enlil =ERG furrow=3SG.POSS=LOC salt(ABS)

ḫa =bi -b -zi.g:RDP-e
MOD=3NH:on-3NH.DO-rise:IPFV -3SG.A:IPFV
'May Enlil have salt come up on his furrows!' (Ean. 63 3:4-6; L; 25)

(178) ***ḫe$_2$-na-be$_2$***
ḫa =i -nna -b -ʔe -e
MOD=VP-3SG.IO-3NH.OO-say:IPFV-3SG.A:IPFV
'May he say it to him!' (FAOS 5/2 Luzag. 1 3:18; N; 24)

Because *ḫa=* can precede the prefix *i-*, it is a proclitic element: it is attached to the front of the verbal form.

From the later Old Akkadian period onwards, the forms of *ḫa=* change: ***ḫe$_2$*** increasingly replaces ***ḫa*** and thus becomes the basic form. Moreover, in an open syllable, its vowel often assimilates to the vowel of the following syllable:

(179) ***ḫu-mu-na-ab-*šum$_2$-*mu***
ḫa =mu -nna -b -šum$_2$-e
MOD=VENT-3SG.IO-3NH.DO-give -3SG.A:IPFV
'He should give it to him.' (NATN 506 rev 1'; N; 21)

(180) ***ḫe$_2$-me-*šum$_2$-*mu***
ḫa =mē -šum$_2$-e
MOD=1PL.IO-give -3SG.A:IPFV
'He should give it to us.' (FAOS 19 Gir 23 8; L; 23)

§113 Verbal forms with the proclitic *ḫa=* always have a modal meaning. They express assertions, wishes, requests, or commands. Their meaning differs according to whether the verbal form is perfective or imperfective.

Imperfective forms with *ḫa=* are always active, always refer to an action, and always express a wish, a request, or a command:

(181) **^{d}en-lil$_2$-*le*, *ḫe$_2$-ḫa-lam-me***
en.lil$_2$=e ḫa =i -n -ḫa.lam -e
Enlil =ERG MOD=VP-3SG.DO-annihilate-3SG.A:IPFV
'May Enlil annihilate him!' (Ent. 28 6:19-20; L; 25)

(182) ***ḫe₂-na-ab-*šum₂*-mu***
ḫa =i -nna -b -šum₂-e
MOD=VP-3SG.IO-3NH.DO-give -3SG.A:IPFV
'He should give it to him!' (TCS 1:345 3; D; 21)

Perfective forms with *ḫa=* can also be used to express a wish, a request, or a command, but only in forms with a stative or passive meaning:

(183) **mu-*ne₂* (...), dub-*ta ḫe₂-em-ta-*ŋar**
mu =ane dub =ta ḫa =i -m -ta -ŋar
name=3SG.POSS(ABS) tablet=ABL MOD=VP-VENT-from-place:PFV
'May his name be removed from the tablet!' (St B 9:15-16; L; 22)

(184) **bala-*a-na še-ŋar ḫe₂-*ŋal₂**
balaʔ=ane =ʔa še.ŋar ḫa =i -ŋal₂
reign =3SG.POSS=LOC famine(ABS) MOD=VP-be.there:PFV
'Let there be famine during his reign!' (St B 9:22; L; 22)

Forms with *ḫa=* cannot be negated. For negative wishes, requests or commands, forms with *na(n)-* are used (§115).

§114 Perfective forms with *ḫa=* mostly express assertions:

(185) **e₂-kiš-*nu-*ŋal₂*-la ḫa-ba-an-*ku₄*-re-en***
e₂.kiš.nu.ŋal₂=ʔa ḫa =ba -n -ku₄.r -en
Ekishnugal =LOC MOD=MID-in-enter:PFV-1SG.S
'I truly entered the Ekishnugal!' (Shulgi A 50; OB)

For expressing a negative assertion the prefix *bara-* is used (§117).

Further reading: DGS §25.4.

24.4. The negative modal prefix *na(n)-*

§115 The negative prefix *na(n)-* expresses a negative command or a negative request. It is almost exclusively found in imperfective forms. It has two basic forms: /na/ is used before a cluster of two consonants (i.e., before /CC/) and /nan/ before a single consonant (i.e., before /CV/). The final /n/ of /nan/ may become /m/ before a labial consonant. E.g.:

(186) **lu₂ *na-ab-*dab₅*-e***
lu₂ =e na -b -dab₅-e
man=ERG NEG.MOD-3NH.DO-take -3SG.A:IPFV
'Nobody should seize it!' (Ean. 62 Face A=4 2:6'; L; 25)

(187) **e₂-gal-*še₃ na-an-*du-*un***
e₂.gal =še nan -du -en
palace=TERM NEG.MOD-go:IPFV-1SG.S
'I do not want to go to the palace.' (YOS 4:1 5; U; 21)

(188) **lu₂ *nam-mu-da-*du**
lu₂ nan -mu -ʔ -da -du
man(ABS) NEG.MOD-VENT-1SG-with-go:IPFV
'Let no one come with me!' (Lugalbanda II 285; OB)

The negative modal prefix *na(n)-* has two basic functions. Firstly, it is the negative counterpart of the imperative:

(189) **[kar-*k*]*ed na-an-*sa₁₀-sa₁₀-*an***

kar.ked na -n -sa$_{10}$:RDP -en
prostitute(ABS) NEG.MOD-3SG.DO-barter:IPFV-2SG.A
'Do not buy a prostitute!' (Instr.Shur. 159; OB)

Secondly, *na(n)-* is the negative counterpart of *ḫa=*:

(190) **^{ŋeš}*gu-za* gub-*ba-na*, suḫuš-*be$_2$*, *na-an-ge-ne$_2$*, numun-*a-ne$_2$ ḫe$_2$*-til**
gu.za gub -ʔa =ane =ak suḫuš =be
chair stand-NMLZ=3SG.POSS=GEN foundation=3NH.POSS(ABS)

nan -ge.n -e numun=ane ḫa =i -til
NEG.MOD-be.firm-3SG.A:IPFV seed =3SG.POSS(ABS) MOD=VP-end
'May she not make firm the foundation of his standing throne! May his offspring come to an end!' (St C 4:13-16; L; 22)

The negative prefix *na(n)-* should not be confused with the non-negative prefix *na-* that is mostly found in perfective forms (see §119).

Further reading: DGS §25.5.

24.5. The modal prefix *ga-*

§116 The prefix *ga-* has a double function. It gives the verbal form a modal meaning, expressing a promise or undertaking on the part of the speaker. At the same time, it indicates that the verbal form has a transitive or intransitive subject of the first person. E.g.:

(191) **e$_2$-*zu* *ga-mu-ra*-du$_3$**
e$_2$.j =zu ga -mu -ra -du$_3$
house=2SG.POSS(ABS) MOD:1SG.A-VENT-2SG.IO-erect
'I will build your house for you!' (Cyl A 2:14; L; 22)

(192) **e$_2$-*za* *ga*-gub, *ga-am$_3$-ta*-e$_3$**
e$_2$.j =zu =ʔa ga -n -gub ga -m -ta -ʔe$_3$
house=2SG.POSS=LOC MOD:1SG.S-in-stand MOD:1SG.S-VENT-from-go.out
'I will serve in your house! I will go out of it!' (BE 3/1:4 5-6; N; 21)

The prefix *ga-* cannot be negated. Instead a form with *bara-* is used (§117). The previous example, for instance, is continued as follows:

(193) **[*b*]*a-ra-ba*-zaḫ$_3$-*de$_3$-e*[*n$_6$*!]**
bara -ba -zaḫ$_3$ -ed -en
CAT.NEG-MID-run.away-IPFV-1SG.S
'I will not run away!' (BE 3/1:4 7; N; 21)

The verbal forms with the prefix *ga-* have a hybrid make-up: their stems are as in perfective forms but their inflection is as in imperfective forms. A final person-prefix can, for instance, be used to designate the direct object:

(194) **ŋešgem-*be$_2$ ga-ra-ab*-šum$_2$**
ŋešgem=be ga -ra -b -šum$_2$
sign =3NH.POSS(ABS) MOD:1SG.A-2SG.IO-3NH.DO-give
'I will give you its sign!' (Cyl A 9:9; L; 22)

Further reading: DGS §25.6.

24.6. The negative modal prefix *bara-*

§117 The negative modal prefix *bara-* expresses a categorical negation, meaning something like 'certainly not' or 'absolutely not'. It can be used with the perfective and the imperfective. It always begins the verbal form. Its basic form is /bara/, which is always written ***ba-ra-***. E.g.:

(195) **na du$_3$-*a-be$_2$*, *ba-ra*-bu$_x$-*ře$_6$***
na du$_3$ -ʔa =be bara -bu$_3$.ř -en
stone erect-NMLZ=3NH.POSS(ABS) CAT.NEG-tear.out-1SG.A
'I will not tear out its stelas (lit. "erected stones")!' (Ean. 1 obv 21:2-3; L; 25)

This ***ba-ra-*** should not be confused with ***ba-ra-*** < ***ba-ta-*** (see §94).

An imperfective form with *bara-* strongly denies that some action happens or will happen:

(196) **ma$_2$ *ba-ra-mu-e-da-ab*-bala-*e***
ma$_2$ bara -mu -e -da -b -balaʔ-e
boat(ABS) CAT.NEG-VENT-2SG-with-3NH.DO-cross -3SG.A:IPFV
'You cannot bring a boat across!' (Proverb Collection 3.76; OB)

(197) ***ba-ra*-gi$_4$-gi$_4$-*nam***
bara -gi$_4$:RDP -en =ʔam
CAT.NEG-return:IPFV-2SG.S=COP:3NH.S
'You will never return!' (Lugalbanda II 336; OB)

An imperfective form with a subject of the first person is the negative counterpart of a verbal form with the modal prefix *ga-* (§116).

Perfective forms with the prefix *bara-* are the negative counterparts of perfective forms with the modal proclitic *ḫa=* (§114). They are used to strongly deny that something happened:

(198) **su *ba-ra-ba-da*-zi**
su bara -ba -ʔ -da -zi.g
skin(ABS) CAT.NEG-MID-1SG-with-rise:PFV
'I was not afraid! (lit. "The skin certainly did not rise with me!")' (Shulgi A 70; OB)

Or they are used to strongly deny a state:

(199) **ki-*ne$_2$ ba-ra*-zu**
ki =ane bara -ʔ -zu
place=3SG.POSS(ABS) CAT.NEG-1SG.A-know:PFV
'I don't know where he is!' (Dumuzi's Dream 144; OB)

Further reading: DGS §25.7.

25. THE RARE PREFIXES *ŠI-*, *NA-* (SLOT 2), AND *NGA-* (SLOT 3)

§118 The prefix *ši-* or *ša-* is found in perfective as well as in imperfective forms, but we do not know what it means. Its vowel may assimilate to the vowel of the following syllable. We find the forms /ši/, /še/, /ša/, and /šu/. E.g.:

(200) **[ba]ra$_2$ e$_2$-kur-*ra-ka* dur$_2$ *ša-mu-da-a*-ŋar**
bara$_2$ e$_2$.kur=ak =ʔa dur$_2$ ši -mu -n -da -e -ŋar
dais Ekur =GEN=LOC buttocks(ABS) PFM-VENT-3SG-with-2SG.A-place:PFV
'you sit down with him on the dais of the Ekur' (BE 31:4 1:9 (Shulgi H); OB copy)

In Southern Old Sumerian, the vowel of *ši-* alternates between /i/ and /e/ according to the rule of vowel harmony (§21). This prefix *ši-* should not be confused with the dimensional prefix *ši-* treated above in §95.

§119 The non-negative prefix *na-* is restricted to narrative texts: it only occurs in some royal inscriptions and literary texts. Its function remains obscure. One aspect of its meaning is beyond doubt, though: it is non-negative and should not be confused with the negative prefix *na(n)-* (§115). E.g.:

(201) **ma$_2$-gur$_8$-*ra-na* ŋiri$_3$ *nam-mi*-gub**
ma$_2$.gur$_8$=ane =ʔa ŋiri$_3$ na -m -bi -n -gub
boat =3SG.POSS=LOC foot(ABS) PFM-VENT-3NH:on-3SG.A-stand
'He stepped (lit. "had (his) foot stand") on his boat.' (Cyl A 2:4; L; 22)

Note that non-negative *na-* is mostly found in perfective forms and negative *na(n)-* mostly in imperfective forms.

§120 The meaning of the prefix *nga-* is generally described as 'also', 'and then', or the like. However, the prefix is far too rare to have such a simple meaning. In other words: we do not really know what it means. It is mostly found in a few fixed expressions, as for instance in this part of a common incantation formula:

(202) **niŋ$_2$ *i$_3$*-zu-*a a-ne in-ga-an*-zu**
niŋ$_2$ i -ʔ -zu -ʔa a.nē=e i -nga-n -zu
thing(ABS) VP-1SG.A-know:PFV-NMLZ(ABS) he =ERG VP-also-3SG.A-know:PFV
'The things I know, he knows *too*.' (TrD 1 13; ?; 21)

Further reading: DGS chapter 23 for *nga-* and chapter 26 for *na-* and *ši-*.

26. COORDINATION

§121 English uses conjunctions like *and* and *or* to coordinate nouns (*a man and his dog*) and clauses (*He came and he conquered*). Sumerian does not have such conjunctions, at least not in origin. During the Old Akkadian period or so, it took over the conjunction ***u$_3$*** 'and' from Akkadian *u* 'and', and this ***u$_3$*** is from then on sometimes used to coordinate noun phrases or clauses. But this is under Akkadian influence and differs from how Sumerian normally expresses coordination.

26.1. Coordinate noun phrases

§122 To express the meaning 'and' with noun phrases, Sumerian uses several different methods. The most common one is to place them simply side by side. E.g.:

(203) ***nu*-siki *nu-ma*-kuš**
nu.siki nu.ma.kuš
orphan widow
'orphan and widow' (Ukg. 4 12:23; L 24)

Coordinate noun phrases normally share a single case marker at the end:

(204) **an ki-*a***
an ki =ʔa
heaven earth=LOC
'in heaven and on earth' (e.g., Cyl A 1: 1; L; 22)

(205) **bara$_2$ ^{d}en-lil$_2$-*la$_2$*, bara$_2$ ^{d}utu-*ka***

bara$_2$.g en.lil$_2$=ak bara$_2$.g utu =ak =ʔa
dais Enlil =GEN dais Utu=GEN=LOC
'on Enlil's dais and on Utu's dais' (Ukg. 16 1:12-13; L; 24)

If there are many nouns coordinated at the same time, the case marker may repeated after each one of them.

§123 Sometimes, the conjunction *=be* 'and' is used to coordinate two noun phrases, but never more than two. It is attached to the last word of the second noun phrase:

(206) **idigna, buranun-*be$_2$***
idigna buranun =be
Tigris Euphrates=and
'the Tigris and the Euphrates' (FAOS 5/2 Luzag. 1 2:6-7; N; 24)

This *=be* 'and' is sometimes reinforced with the comitative case marker *=da*.

Further reading: DGS §5.4.

26.2. Coordinate clauses

§124 Clauses are coordinated by placing them simply side by side. We can only see this where the coordinate clauses are parts of a larger grammatical unit. E.g.:

(207) **mu *ba*-gaz e$_2$ ḫulu-*a* *i$_3$*-me-*a*-*še$_3$***
mu ba -gaz e$_2$.j ḫulu -ʔa i -me-ʔa =ak =še
name MID-kill house(ABS) destroy-NMLZ VP-COP-NMLZ=GEN=TERM
'because he was killed *and* the household was destroyed' (MVN 2:2 case 3; L; 21)

More literally, this clause means 'for the name of that he was killed (and) the house was destroyed'. Note that the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa* after ***i$_3$*-me** also applies to ***ba*-gaz**: coordinate clauses may share a single nominalizing suffix.

Further reading: DGS §27.2.

27. THE NOMINALIZATION OF CLAUSES

27.1. Nominalization

§125 Nominalization is turning something that is not a noun or a noun phrase into something that is. It is a very common process in Sumerian. The most important nominalizations are:

- Nominalized adjectives (see below in this section)
- Nominalized numerals (§55)
- Nominalized clauses (the topic of this chapter)
- Nominalized verbs (the topic of the next chapter)

Sumerian nominalizations are either unmarked or show the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa*. The two differ in meaning. Compare, for example, the two nominalizations of the adjective **sukud** 'high': **sukud** means 'height' and **sukud-*da*** 'high one, highest one'.

§126 The basic form of the nominalizing suffix is /ʔa/. The initial /ʔ/ assimilates to a preceding consonant. The suffix is always written out, either as ***-a*** or as -C***a***, where C represents the preceding consonant. An example of a -C***a*** spelling is the form **sukud-*da*** above.

Further reading: DGS chapter 31.

27.2. Nominalized clauses (slot 16)

§127 The normal way in Sumerian to make a subordinate clause is to turn an entire clause into a noun phrase. Because of this, nominalized clauses, that is, clauses turned into noun phrases, are very common in Sumerian. Almost all nominalized clauses show the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa* (§126), which is attached at the end of the nominalized clause. If there are two or more coordinate nominalized clauses, the last always has the nominalizing suffix {ʔa}, but the preceding ones may lack it, as in ex. (207) above.

Sumerian nominalized clauses can be divided into two types on the basis of their meaning. They are either event nominalizations or participant nominalizations. Event nominalizations express events. They have basically the same meanings as independent clauses and can often be translated with English *that*-clauses. Event nominalizations are used in two different kinds of constructions. One use is as a complement clause. E.g.:

(208) ***in-na*-sa$_6$-*ga*, urdu$_2$ *du-du in-na*-ba-*a***
in.na.sa$_6$.ga=r urdu$_2$.d du.du=e i -nna -n -ba -ʔa
Innasaga =DAT slave(ABS) Dudu =ERG VP-3SG.IO-3SG.A-portion.out-NMLZ
'that Dudu allotted the slave to Innasaga' (NG 99 21-22; L; 21)

This use is treated in §§136ff.

The second use of an event nominalization is as an adverbial clause. It is discussed in §§140ff. Here one example will suffice:

(209) **munus-*e* dumu *i$_3$*-du$_2$-*da-a***
munus=e dumu i -n -du$_2$.d -ʔa =ʔa
woman=ERG child(ABS) VP-3SG.A-give.birth.to-NMLZ=LOC
'when (lit. "in that") the woman gave birth to a child' (TSA 45 5:3; L; 24)

This is an event nominalization in the locative case that is translated with an English *when*-clause.

Participant nominalizations express participants that play a role in an event. They can be translated with English clauses beginning with '(the one) who ...', '(the one) which ...', or the like. Participant nominalizations are always used as relative clauses and these are the topic of the following section.

Further reading: DGS §27.3.4.

27.3. Relative clauses

§128 Every Sumerian relative clause is a participant nominalization, that is, a nominalized clause that refers to a person or thing that plays a role in the event expressed by the verb in that clause. There are two basic constructions: one with and one without a head noun. We will start with the former.

A relative clause with a head noun always follows its head noun. The head noun always has a grammatical function in the relative clause, but unlike English, which has *who*, *whom*, *which*, *where*, etc., Sumerian has no special relative pronouns indicating in the relative clause what this function is. Instead, it uses the same person markers that always express a given grammatical function in a clause. Because a relative clause is a part of a noun phrase, the case marker and any other phrase-final clitics belonging to the head noun follow the relative clause. E.g.:

(210) **alan, lu$_2$ e$_2$ ^{d}*ba-u$_2$*, *mu*-du$_3$-*a-kam***
alan lu$_2$ e$_2$.j ba.u$_2$=ak mu -n -du$_3$ -ʔa =ak =ʔam
statue man house Bau =GEN(ABS) VENT-3SG.A-erect-NMLZ=GEN(ABS)=COP:3NH.S

‘This is the statue of the man who built the temple of Bau.’ (St E 9:6-8; L; 22)

This copular clause contains the noun phrase **lu$_2$ e$_2$ ^{d}*ba-u$_2$ mu*-du$_3$-*a-k*** ‘of the man who built the temple of Bau’. This phrase consists of the head noun **lu$_2$** ‘man’ in the genitive case and the relative clause **e$_2$ ^{d}*ba-u$_2$ mu*-du$_3$-*a***. The final person-prefix *n*- in that clause refers back to the head noun **lu$_2$**, indicating that the head noun functions as the transitive subject of the relative clause. Hence, we translate this *n*- with the English relative pronoun *who*.

The head noun can have many different grammatical functions in the relative clause and the translation has to be adapted accordingly. E.g.:

(211) **lu$_2$ e$_2$ ^{d}nanna, *in*-du$_3$-*a***
lu$_2$ e$_2$.j nanna=ak i -n -du$_3$ -ʔa
man house Nanna=GEN(ABS) VP-3SG.A-erect-NMLZ
‘the man *who* built the temple of Nanna’ (FAOS 9/2 Urnammu 1 3-4; Ur; 21)

(212) **ŋeš tir abbar^{ki}-*ka*, *i$_3$*-gub-*ba***
ŋeš tir abbar=ak =ʔa i -n -gub -ʔa
wood forest Abbar=GEN=LOC VP-in-stand-NMLZ
‘trees *which* stood in the forest of Abbar’ (VS 14:178 3:2-3; L; 24)

(213) **inim ^{d}nanše-*e mu-na*-du$_{11}$-*ga-aš***
inim nanše =e mu -nna -n -du$_{11}$.g -ʔa =š
word Nanshe=ERG VENT-3SG.IO-3SG.A-do:PFV-NMLZ=TERM
‘to the words *which* Nanshe had spoken to him’ (Cyl A 7:11; L; 22)

(214) **ki ME-silim-*e*, na *bi$_2$*-du$_3$-*a***
ki ME.silim=e na bi -n -du$_3$ -ʔa
place Mesilim =ERG stone(ABS) 3NH:on-3SG.A-erect-NMLZ
‘the place *where* (lit. “on which”) Mesilim had set up stelas’ (Ean. 6 4:16-17; L; 25)

(215) **lu$_2$ 3 šuku-*be$_2$ i$_3$*-la$_2$-*a***
lu$_2$ 3 šuku.ř =be i -la$_2$ -ʔa =e
man 3 prebend=3NH.POSS(ABS) VP-be.short-NMLZ=ERG
‘the three men *whose* prebends fall short’ (ergative) (NG 215 5; U; 21)

There are also relative clauses without a head noun. They are called ‘headless relative clauses’. In our translation we usually insert a pronoun or something like ‘the one’ on the place of the missing head. For the rest, headless relative clauses are exactly like relative clauses with a head noun:

(216) **e$_2$-*ŋu$_{10}$ ma*-du$_3$-*na***
e$_2$ =ŋu ma -du$_3$ -en -ʔa
house=1SG.POSS(ABS) 1SG.IO-erect-2SG.A-NMLZ
‘you, who will build my temple for me’ (Cyl A 9:8; L; 22)

(217) **zi-*da* gabu$_2$-*na* piriŋ *i$_3$*-nu$_2$-nu$_2$-*a***
zi.d -ʔa gabu$_2$=ane =ʔa piriŋ i -b -nu$_2$-nu$_2$-ʔa
be.right-NMLZ left =3SG.POSS=LOC lion(ABS) VP-3NH:on-lie -lie -NMLZ
‘the one on whose right and left lions were lying’ (Cyl A 5:16; L; 22)

Further reading: DGS §27.4.

28. THE NON-FINITE VERBAL FORMS

§129 Sumerian has four non-finite verbal forms, two of the perfective and two of the imperfective. I have given them names based on their forms:[2]

- the STEM form (e.g. **sar**)
- the STEM-a form (e.g. **sar-*ra***)
- the STEM-ed form (e.g. **sar-*re.d***)
- the STEM-eda form (e.g. **sar-*re-da***)

The first two are the perfective forms. The two imperfective forms are clearly marked as such by the imperfective suffix *-ed* (§70).

The non-finite verbal forms are verbal forms. They show the same stem forms as finite verbal forms, including the reduplicated forms (see §§67ff.). Two of them include the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa* (§126) and all four of them can be negated with the proclitic *nu=* (§110). But for the rest, they never show any other pre- or suffix that can be part of a finite verbal form.

All Sumerian non-finite verbal forms are nominalizations: they are verbs turned into nouns. They are extremely versatile and have many more uses than non-finite forms in European or Semitic languages. As nominalizations, they are first and foremost verbal nouns, but some of them can be used as verbal adjectives as well.

Further reading: DGS §28.1.

28.1. STEM forms

§130 A STEM form consists of a perfective verbal stem, without any affix (e.g. **sar**). It can be used as an event nominalization or as a participant nominalization (see §127 for these terms).

Used as an event nominalization, it can be translated with an infinitive or with an English gerund (*ing*-form). This use is rare. E.g.:

(218) **e_2-ninnu an ki-*ta* bad-*be*$_2$**
e_2.ninnu=ak an ki =ta bad=be
Eninnu =GEN heaven(ABS) earth=ABL open=3NH.POSS
'of the Eninnu, its separating heaven from earth' (Cyl A 1:11; L; 22)

Used as a participant nominalization, a STEM form usually refers to the subject, to the *doer*, e.g. **kas$_4$** 'runner' or 'one who runs', from the verb **kas$_4$** 'run'. This use is also found in compounds like **dub-sar** 'scribe' (lit. 'tablet writer' from the verb **sar** 'write'). It is particularly common with the verbs **zu** 'know' and **tuku** 'have'. E.g.:

(219) **ama *nu*-tuku-*me***
ama nu =tuku =me -en
mother(ABS) NEG=have:PFV=COP-1SG.S
'I am one who has no mother.' (Cyl A 3:6; L; 22)

Further reading: DGS §28.2.

[2] I have modelled these names on the ones Poebel uses in his grammar from 1923. He calls them LAL, LAL-a, LAL-ed, and LAL-ed-a (GSG p. 279), where LAL stands for the stem of the verb that we nowadays read as **la$_2$**.

28.2. STEM-a forms

§131 A STEM-a form consists of a perfective verbal stem followed by the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa* (e.g. **sar-*ra***). It can be used as an event nominalization or as a participant nominalization.

Used as an event nominalization, it expresses an event and can usually be translated with an infinitive, an English *ing*-form, or an English *that*-clause. E.g.:

(220) **gu$_3$-de$_2$-*a* lu$_2$ e$_2$ du$_3$-*a-ke$_4$***
gu$_3$.de$_2$.a lu$_2$ e$_2$.j du$_3$ -ʔa =ak =e
Gudea man house(ABS) erect-NMLZ=GEN=ERG
'Gudea, the temple builder (lit. "the man of that the house is erected")' (ergative) (Cyl A 20:24; L; 22)

(221) **id$_2$-*de$_3$* a zal-*le* si-*a-da***
id$_2$ =e a.j zal -ed si -ʔa =da
river=DIR water flow-IPFV(ABS) fill-NMLZ=COM
'with that flowing water fills the river' (Cyl B 14:25; L; 22)

(222) **e$_2$-ninnu an ki-*da* mu$_2$-*a***
e$_2$.ninnu an ki =da mu$_2$ -ʔa
Eninnu(ABS) heaven earth=COM grow-NMLZ
'that the Eninnu had grown together with heaven and earth' (Cyl B 24:14; L; 22)

STEM-a forms used as event nominalizations are found in several constructions. In non-finite complement clauses, for instance (see §§136ff.):

(223) **lu$_2$ inim-*ma* saŋ sa$_{10}$-*a-še$_3$***
lu$_2$ inim =ak saŋ sa$_{10}$ -ʔa =ak =še
man word=GEN head(ABS) barter:PFV-NMLZ=GEN=TERM
'as witness for ("of") that the slave had been bought' (NG 51 15; U; 21)

Or in various non-finite adverbial clauses and constructions (see §§140ff.). E.g.:

(224) **eger$_5$ dib-*ba-ta***
eger$_5$ dib -ʔa =ak =ta
back pass.by-NMLZ=GEN=ABL
'after (lit. "from the back of") the passing by (of the animals during the yearly inspection)' (TuT 26 3:13; L; 21)

It is also used in the so-called 'pronominal conjugation' and then has always a possessive pronoun attached to it, for example *=be*:

(225) **šeg$_{12}$-*e* e$_2$-*še$_3$* saŋ il$_2$-*la-be$_2$***
šeg$_{12}$=e e$_2$.j =še saŋ il$_2$ -ʔa =be
brick=ERG house=TERM head(ABS) lift-NMLZ=3NH.POSS
'as the brick lifted its head toward the house' (Cyl A 19:17; L; 22)

See §§152f. below for more details on this construction.

§132 Used as a participant nominalization, it refers to a person or thing that plays a role in an event. It is then used in non-finite relative clauses. There are two basic constructions: one with a head noun and one without a head noun. We will start with the former.

A non-finite relative clause always follows its head noun. This head noun always has a grammatical function in the relative clause. E.g.:

(226) **ur-saŋ bara$_2$ ku$_3$-*ga* tuš-*a-ra***

ur.saŋ bara$_2$.g ku$_3$.g=ʔa tuš-ʔa =ra
hero dais pure =LOC sit -NMLZ=DAT
'for the hero sitting on the holy dais' (Cyl B 9:1; L; 22)

(227) **lu$_2$ šuku dab$_5$-*ba***
lu$_2$ šuku.ř dab$_5$-ʔa
man prebend(ABS) take -NMLZ
'the men who hold prebendal land' (VS 14:101 6:1; L; 24)

(228) **e$_2$ *me-lam$_2$-be$_2$* an-*ne$_2$* us$_2$-*sa***
e$_2$ me.lam$_2$=be an =e us$_2$ -ʔa
house awe =3NH.POSS(ABS) heaven=DIR be.next.to-NMLZ
'the house whose awesomeness touches heaven' (Cyl A 17:18; L; 22)

There are also headless non-finite relative clauses, without a head noun. In our translation we usually insert a pronoun or something like 'the one' on the place of the missing head:

(229) **sukud-*řa_2*** (a proper name)
sukud -ʔa
be.high-NMLZ
'long one (lit. "one who is high")' (NG 18 26; L; 21)

Such a form may have a genitive dependent on it. This genitive usually expresses the subject of the non-finite form. E.g.:

(230) **ŋidru maḫ šum$_2$-*ma*, ^{d}nin-*ŋir$_2$-su-ka***
ŋidru maḫ šum$_2$-ʔa nin.ŋir$_2$.su.k=ak
sceptre great(ABS) give -NMLZ Ningirsu =GEN
'the one given the great sceptre by Ningirsu' (Lug. 15 = Ukg. 9 1':4'-5'; L; 24)

A STEM-a form can also be used as a verbal adjective:

(231) **ur-saŋ kalag-*ga* ^{d}en-lil$_2$-*la$_2$***
ur.saŋ kalag -ʔa en.lil$_2$=ak
hero be.strong-NMLZ Enlil =GEN
'the strong hero of Enlil' (St D 1:2-3; L; 22)

This use is a secondary development and may come from its use as a verbal noun in constructions like: "*the hero, the strong one of Enlil".

Further reading: DGS §28.3.

28.3. STEM-ed forms

§133 A STEM-ed form consists of a verbal stem with the imperfective suffix *-ed* (e.g. **sar-*re.d***). It has the same range of meanings as the finite forms of the imperfective. It can be used as an event nominalization or as a participant nominalization.

Used as an event nominalization, it expresses an event and can be translated with an infinitive or with an English gerund (*ing*-form). E.g.:

(232) **e$_2$-*a-ne$_2$* du$_3$-*da ma-an*-du$_{11}$**
e$_2$.j =ane du$_3$ -ed =ʔa ma -n -du$_{11}$.g
house=3SG.POSS(ABS) erect-IPFV=LOC 1SG.IO-3SG.A-say:PFV
'He spoke to me about ("on") building his temple.' (Cyl A 4:20; L; 22)

(233) **^{d}nin-*ŋir$_2$-su-ra* e$_2$-ninnu-*a* inim-*be$_2$* ku$_4$-ku$_4$-*da***

nin.ŋir$_2$.su.k=ra e$_2$.ninnu=ʔa inim=be ku$_4$.r:RDP-ed =da
Ningirsu =DAT Eninnu =LOC word=this(ABS) enter:IPFV -IPFV=COM
'with bringing these messages into the Eninnu to Ningirsu' (Cyl B 9:2; L; 22)

STEM-ed forms used as event nominalizations are found in several constructions. In non-finite complement clauses, for instance (see §§136ff.):

(234) **iti šeg$_{12}$-*ga-ka* su-su-*da*, mu lugal-*be$_2$***
iti.d šeg$_{12}$=ak =ʔa su.g:RDP-ed =ak mu lugal=ak =be
month brick =GEN=LOC repay:IPFV-IPFV=GEN name king =GEN=3NH.POSS
'(an oath by) the king's name about repaying in the Month of the Brick (lit. "of repaying ... its name of the king")' (TMHC NF 1/2:73 case 5-6; N; 21)

Or in various non-finite adverbial clauses and constructions (see §§140ff.). E.g.:

(235) **e$_2$ ^{d}nin-*ŋir$_2$-su-ka* du$_3$-*de$_3$***
e$_2$.j nin.ŋir$_2$.su.k=ak du$_3$ -ed =e
house Ningirsu =GEN(ABS) erect-IPFV=DIR
'in order to build Ningirsu's house' (Cyl A 14:28; L; 22)

§134 Used as a participant nominalization, it refers to a person or thing that plays a role in an event. It is then used in non-finite relative clauses. It then always follows its head noun. This head noun always has a grammatical function in the relative clause. E.g.:

(236) **ša$_3$ ab-*gen$_7$* zi-zi-*zu***
ša$_3$.g ab =gen zi.g:RDP-ed =zu
heart sea=EQU rise:IPFV -IPFV=2SG.POSS
'your heart, which rises like the sea' (Cyl A 8:23; L; 22)

(237) **kur ^{ŋeš}eren-*na* lu$_2$ *nu*-ku$_4$-ku$_4$-*da***
kur eren =ak lu$_2$ nu =ku$_4$.r:RDP-ed =ʔa
mountains cedar=GEN man(ABS) NEG=enter:IPFV -IPFV=LOC
'into the cedar mountains, where no one can enter' (Cyl A 15:19; L; 22)

(238) **lugal a$_2$ dugud-*da-ne$_2$* kur-*e* *nu*-il$_2$-*e***
lugal a$_2$ dugud=ane kur =e nu =il$_2$ -ed
king arm heavy =3SG.POSS(ABS) mountains=ERG NEG=lift-IPFV
'the king whose heavy arm no foreign land can bear' (St D 5:2-3; L; 22)

Further reading: DGS §28.4.

28.4. STEM-eda forms

§135 A STEM-eda form consists of a verbal stem with the imperfective suffix *-ed* and the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa* (e.g. **sar-*re-da***). It is only used as an event nominalization and only in one specific construction, the so-called 'pronominal conjugation'. It has always a possessive pronoun attached to it, for example *=be*:

(239) **umma^{ki}, e-*be$_2$* bala-*e-da-be$_2$***
umma e.g =be =e balaʔ-ed -ʔa =be
Umma(ABS) canal=this=DIR cross -IPFV-NMLZ=3NH.POSS
'when Umma crosses this canal' (Ean. 1 rev 5:37-38; L; 25)

See §§152f. below for more details on this construction.

Note that there are many STEM-eda look-alikes that are actually STEM-ed forms. The following types of forms look like STEM-eda forms but are not:

- STEM-ed followed by the genitive case marker *=ak*
- STEM-ed followed by the locative case marker *=ʔa*
- STEM-ed followed by the comitative case marker *=da*
- STEM-ed followed by the possessive pronoun *=ane* ‘his, her’
- STEM-ed followed by the possessive pronoun *=anēnē* ‘their’

Further reading: DGS §28.5.

29. COMPLEMENT CLAUSES

29.1. Complement clauses with verbs

§136 Certain verbs can have a clause as their subject or object. Such a clause is called a complement clause. Complement clauses are used to express indirect speech. They report someone’s speech without quoting that person’s exact words. In Sumerian, complement clauses are so far found with the verbs **du$_{11}$.g** and **e** ‘say’, **ge.n** ‘be/make firm, prove’, and **zu** ‘know, learn’. E.g.:

(240) ***i$_3$-za-ḫa*$^!$ *in-na-an*-du$_{11}$**
i -zaḫ$_3$ -ʔa i -nna -n -du$_{11}$.g
VP-run.away-NMLZ VP-3SG.IO-3SG.A-say:PFV
‘He said to him that she had run off.’ (SNAT 519 4; U; 21)

§137 Normally the verb **du$_{11}$.g** and other verbs of speaking are used with direct speech and not with indirect speech. In direct speech the exact words spoken are quoted:

(241) ***ma-an*-šum$_2$-*na-a* geme$_2$-*ŋu$_{10}$* *nu-ra*-šum$_2$ *bi$_2$-in*-du$_{11}$**
ma.an.šum$_2$.na=e geme$_2$ =ŋu nu =ra -ʔ -šum$_2$
Manshumna =ERG slave.woman=1SG.POSS(ABS) NEG=2SG.IO-1SG.A-give

bi -n -du$_{11}$.g
3NH.OO-3SG.A-say:PFV
‘Manshumna said: “I did not give my slave woman to you”.’ (NG 195 6; L; 21)

§138 Sumerian has a quotation suffix *-eše* that is used within direct speech to mark quoted speech of someone else. It is attached to the last word of the quotation. In Old Babylonian Sumerian it is written ***-e-še*** but ***-eše$_2$*** (ŠE$_3$) in the Gudea texts:

(242) **lu$_2$ an-*gen$_7$* ri-*ba* ki-*gen$_7$* ri-*ba-eše$_2$***
lu$_2$ an =gen ri.b -ʔa ki =gen ri.b -ʔa -eše
man heaven=EQU be.huge-NMLZ earth=EQU be.huge-NMLZ-QUOT
‘“«A man as huge as heaven, as huge as the earth», you say”’ (Cyl A 5:13; L; 22)

29.2. Complement clauses with nouns

§139 Some nouns have a meaning that allows them to refer to an actual speech event. They, too, can be construed with a complement clause. Such a clause is always in the genitive case:

(243) **lu$_2$ inim-*ma* inim til-*a-kam***
lu$_2$ inim =ak inim til -ʔa =ak =ʔam
man word=GEN word(ABS) end-NMLZ=GEN=COP:3NH.S
‘He is the witness that the matter was completed.’ (BIN 8:172 16; I; 23)

Most complement clauses with nouns are construed as anticipatory genitives. The clause in the genitive case is then found at the beginning of the sentence, while the head noun shows the possessive pronoun *=be* which refers back to the preceding genitive:

(244) **e$_2$-*ŋu$_{10}$* du$_3$-*da* ŋešgem-*be$_2$* *ga-ra-ab*-šum$_2$**
e$_2$.j =ŋu du$_3$ -ed =ak ŋešgem=be
house=1SG.POSS(ABS) erect-IPFV=GEN sign =3NH.POSS(ABS)

ga -ra -b -šum$_2$
MOD:1SG.A-2SG.IO-3NH.DO-give
'I will give you the sign for building my temple (lit. "of erecting my house, I will give you its sign")!' (Cyl A 9:9; L; 22)

Further reading: DGS §27.5.

30. ADVERBIAL CLAUSES

§140 Most English adverbial clauses are introduced by conjunctions such as *when*, *until*, or *because*. This type of adverbial clause is also found in Sumerian but is there rare:

- Temporal clauses with ***en-na*** 'until'
- Conditional clauses with **u$_4$-*da*** 'if' and **tukum-*be$_2$*** 'if'

Most Sumerian adverbial clauses involve event nominalizations, that is, clauses that have been turned into noun phrases that express events. There are three basic constructions:

- constructions with a nominalized clause in the genitive case
- constructions with a nominalized clause in an adverbial case
- constructions with a nominalized clause used as an apposition

We will meet each of them in the following sections.

30.1. Temporal clauses

§141 The most common temporal clause is a nominalized clause in the locative case. It can be translated with an English *when*-clause. E.g.:

(245) **ensi$_2$, e$_2$-mi$_2$-*a, mu*-ti-*la-a*, e$_2$-mi$_2$-*še$_3$, ba*-ře$_6$**
ensi$_2$.k e$_2$.mi$_2$=ʔa mu -n -ti.l -ʔa =ʔa e$_2$.mi$_2$=še ba -ře$_6$
ruler(ABS) Emi =LOC VENT-in-live-NMLZ=LOC Emi =TERM MID-bring:PFV
'When (lit. "in that") the ruler stayed in the Emi, this was brought to the Emi.' (DP 164 3:5-9; L; 24)

Such clauses are usually placed as appositions after time words such as **mu** 'year', **iti.d** 'month', and **u$_4$.d** 'day, time':

(246) **u$_4$ *ur-kiš^{ki}-ta, i$_3$-im*-ŋen-*na-a***
u$_4$.d ur.kiš =ta i -m -ŋen -ʔa =ʔa
day Urkish=ABL VP-VENT-go:PFV-NMLZ=LOC
'when (lit. "one the day that") he came from Urkish' (TCL 2:5565 3-4; D; 21)

§142 A nominalized clause in the ablative case can be translated with an English temporal clause introduced by *after* or *since*. E.g.:

(247) ***a-ga-de$_3^{ki}$, nam*-lugal, šu *ba-ab*-ti-*a-ta***
a.ga.de$_3$=e nam.lugal šu =e ba -b -ti -ʔa =ta
Akkad =ERG kingship(ABS) hand=DIR 3NH.IO-3NH.A-approach-NMLZ=ABL
'after Akkad had received the kingship' (DC 2 p. 57 4':9'-11'; L; 23)

Such a clause can also be placed as an apposition after a time word such as **u$_4$.d** 'day, time':

(248) **u$_4$ e$_2$-gal-*e ba-ab*-tum$_2$-*ma-ta***

u_4.d e_2.gal=e ba -b -tum$_2$-ʔa =ta
day palace=ERG MID-3NH.A-bring -NMLZ=ABL
'since (lit. "from the day that") the palace had taken him away' (NG 190 23; L; 21)

§143 Another construction in the ablative case involves the body part noun **eger$_4$** 'back'. This noun is often used in temporal expressions such as the following:

(249) **eger$_4$ gurum$_2$-*ma-ta***
eger$_4$ gurum$_2$ =ak =ta
back inventory=GEN=ABL
'after stock-taking (lit. "from the back of the inventory")' (Nik 1:199 3:1; L; 24)

This expression is also found with a nominalized clause instead of a noun in the genitive case:

(250) **eger$_4$ kešš$_3^{ki}$-*ta*, *ba*-uš$_2$-*ša$_4$-ta***
eger$_4$ kešš$_3$.ta ba -ʔuš$_2$ -ʔa =ak =ta
back Keshta(ABS) MID-die:SING-NMLZ=GEN=ABL
'after Keshta died' (DP 482 6:1-2; L; 24)

§144 The word **en-*na*** 'until' is also used in temporal clauses. It is found in two different constructions. Firstly, it can be used with a perfective verbal form in a nominalized clause in the terminative case:

(251) **[en]si$_2$ *en-na i$_3$*-ŋen-*na-aš***
ensi$_2$.k en.na i -m -ŋen -ʔa =š
ruler(ABS) until VP-VENT-go:PFV-NMLZ=TERM
'until the governor comes' (TJAMC IOS 40 4-5; L; 21)

Secondly, it can be used in a clause that is not nominalized and that normally contains an imperfective verbal form:

(252) ***en-na am$_3$*-du**
en.na a -m -du
until VP-VENT-go:IPFV
'until he comes' (TCS 1:125 8; N; 21)

Further reading: DGS §27.6.2-4.

30.2. Reason clauses

§145 There are four types of reason clauses, but they are not used together in the same period. As a result of linguistic change, two older types of reason clause are replaced by two more recent ones.

One of the two older constructions involves the noun **bar** 'outside' in the locative case. The expression 'on the outside of' came to mean 'because of'. It is used with a noun or with a nominalized clause in the genitive case:

(253) **bar še-*ba-ka***
bar še =be =ak =ʔa
outside barley=this=GEN=LOC
'because of this barley' (Ukg. 6 4':1'; L; 24)

(254) **bar še-*be$_2$ nu-da-su$_3$-su$_3$-da-ka***
bar še =be nu =i -n -da -su.g:RDP-ed -ʔa =ak =ʔa
outside barley=this(ABS) NEG=VP-3SG-with-repay:IPFV-IPFV-NMLZ=GEN=LOC

‘because this barley could not be repaid by him’ (Ent. 28 2:27; L; 25)

§146 By the Ur III period, this construction with **bar** ‘outside’ has been replaced by a construction with the noun **mu** ‘name’ in the terminative case. It, too, is used with a noun or with a nominalized clause in the genitive case. E.g.:

(255) **mu še-*na-še*$_3$**
mu še =ane =ak =še
name barley=3SG.POSS=GEN=TERM
‘because of his barley’ (MVN 3:279 6; A; 21)

(256) **mu *nu-da*-su-su-*da*-še$_3$**
mu nu =i -n -da -su.g:RDP-ed -ʔa =ak =še
name NEG=VP-3SG-with-repay:IPFV-IPFV-NMLZ=GEN=TERM
‘because it cannot be repaid by him’ (PIOL 19:344 3; U; 21)

§147 The second of the two older constructions is one with suffixed /akanam/, the structure of which is not yet entirely clear. By the time of Gudea at the latest, it had been replaced by one with suffixed /akeš/. Two proper names illustrate this nicely:

(257) ***ŋa*$_2$-*ka*-*nam*-*ḫe*$_2$-ti**
ŋa=ak =ʔa nam ḫa =i -ti.l
I =GEN=LOC status MOD=VP-live
‘May she live because of me!’ (Nik 1:16 8:5; L; 24)

(258) ***ŋa*$_2$-*ke*$_4$-*eš*$_2$-*ḫe*$_2$-ti**
ŋa=ak =eš ḫa =i -ti.l
I =GEN=ADV MOD=VP-live
‘May she live because of me!’ (e.g., MVN 11:163 13; U; 21)

Both constructions are also found with nominalized clauses. E.g.:

(259) **ur-saŋ ug$_5$-*ga* *i*$_3$-*me*-*ša*-*ke*$_4$-*eš*$_2$**
ur.saŋ ug$_5$ -ʔa i -me-eš -ʔa =ak =eš
warrior die:PLUR-NMLZ(ABS) VP-COP-3PL.S-NMLZ=GEN=ADV
‘because they were killed heroes’ (Cyl A 26:15; L; 22)

This /akeš/ consists of the genitive case marker *=ak* followed by adverbiative *=eš*. Originally it may have meant something like ‘in the manner of that of’, but its attested meanings are ‘concerning’ and ‘because (of)’.

Further reading: DGS §27.6.5.

30.3. Conditional clauses

§148 Sumerian has two different constructions that function as conditional clauses. One is already attested in Old Sumerian: conditional clauses with the conjunction **u$_4$-*da*** ‘if’. They contain, as a rule, a verbal form in the imperfective and are followed by a main clause with an imperfective or modal form. E.g.:

(260) **u$_4$-*da* *nu*-*še*$_3$-sa$_{10}$-sa$_{10}$, ugula libiš-*be*$_2$, *na*-*na*-tag-*ge***
u$_4$.da nu =i -n -ši-sa$_{10}$:RDP -e
if NEG=VP-3SG-to-barter:IPFV-3SG.A:IPFV

ugula =e libiš =be na -nna -tag -e
foreman=ERG anger=3NH.POSS(ABS) NEG.MOD-3SG.IO-touch-3SG.A:IPFV

'If he does not buy it from him, the foreman should not let (his) anger about this touch him!' (Ukg. 4 11:29-31; L; 24)

§149 Conditional clauses with the conjunction **tukum-*be₂*** 'if' are attested from the time of Gudea onwards. They contain, as a rule, a verbal form in the perfective (and not the imperfective, as with **u₄-*da***) and are followed by a main clause with an imperfective or modal form. E.g.:

(261) **tukum-*be₂* *la-ba*-šum₂ tab-*dam***
tukum.be nu =ba -šum₂ tab -ed =ʔam
if NEG=MID-give double-IPFV=COP:3NH.S
'If this (silver) is not given, it is to be doubled.' (NRVN 1:116 8; N; 21)

§150 Both **u₄-*da*** 'if' and **tukum-*be₂*** 'if' are usually the first word of the conditional clause, but sometimes they are not in initial position. Both are adverbs in origin.

Further reading: DGS §27.6.6.

30.4. Purpose clauses

§151 The normal method in Sumerian for making a purpose clause is to use a STEM-ed form (§133) in the directive case. A purpose clause always lacks an explicit subject. E.g.:

(262) **gu₄ id₂-*de₃* bala-*e*-*de₃***
gu₄.r id₂ =e balaʔ**-ed =e**
ox(ABS) river=DIR cross-IPFV=DIR
'(in order) to bring oxen across the river' (TCTI 1:641 23; L; 21)

As in English, the subject of the verb, the one who is doing the bringing, is not mentioned.

30.5. The 'pronominal conjugation'

§152 The so-called 'pronominal conjugation' is a kind of circumstantial clause with a STEM-a or a STEM-eda form as its predicate. Its subject is always expressed by an enclitic possessive pronoun (§45) attached to the non-finite form. In addition, forms of the first or second person always show the case marker *=ne*, whereas third person forms lack any case marker. The following table gives the basic make-up of the attested forms:

	Perfective		***Imperfective***	
	Spelling	***Analysis***	***Spelling***	***Analysis***
1SG	**sar-*ra-ŋu₁₀-ne***	STEM-**ʔa=ŋu=ne**	**sar-*re-da-ŋu₁₀-ne***	STEM-**ed-ʔa=ŋu=ne**
2SG	**sar-*ra-zu-ne***	STEM-**ʔa=zu=ne**	**sar-*re-da-zu-ne***	STEM-**ed-ʔa=zu=ne**
3SG	**sar-*ra-ne₂***	STEM-**ʔa=ane**	**sar-*re-da-ne₂***	STEM-**ed-ʔa=ane**
3NH	**sar-*ra-be₂***	STEM-**ʔa=be**	**sar-*re-da-be₂***	STEM-**ed-ʔa=be**
1PL	(not yet attested)			
2PL	(not yet attested)			
3PL	**sar-*ra-ne-ne***	STEM-**ʔa=anēnē**	**sar-*re-da-ne-ne***	STEM-**ed-ʔa=anēnē**

Most attested forms are of the third person:

(263) ***a₂* nu₂-*da-ka-na* ku₄-*ra-ne₂***

e$_2$.j nu$_2$-ed =ak =ane =ʔa ku$_4$.r -ʔa =ane
house lie -IPFV=GEN=3SG.POSS=LOC enter:PFV-NMLZ=3SG.POSS
'when she entered her bedroom (lit. "her house of lying down")' (Cyl B 5:12; L; 22)

(264) **ur-saŋ e$_2$-*a*-*na* ku$_4$-ku$_4$-*da*-*ne$_2$***
ur.saŋ e$_2$.j =ane =ʔa ku$_4$.r:RDP-ed -ʔa =ane
warrior(ABS) house=3SG.POSS=LOC enter:IPFV -IPFV-NMLZ=3SG.POSS
'when the warrior was entering his house' (Cyl B 5:4; L; 22)

(265) **šeg$_{12}$-*e* e$_2$-*še$_3$* saŋ il$_2$-*la*-*be$_2$***
šeg$_{12}$=e e$_2$.j =še saŋ il$_2$ -ʔa =be
brick=ERG house=TERM head(ABS) lift-NMLZ=3NH.POSS
'when the brick lifted its head toward the house' (Cyl A 19:17; L; 22)

§153 The case marker *=ne* in the forms of the first and second person is only found in the pronominal conjugation and in a few fixed expressions. It is without doubt cognate with the locative prefix *ni-* 'in'. E.g.:

(266) ***ŋa$_2$-e* ŋen-*na*-*ŋu$_{10}$*-*ne***
ŋa$_2$.e ŋen -ʔa =ŋu =ne
I(ABS) go:PFV-NMLZ=1SG.POSS=LOC2
'when I come (lit. "I, in my coming")' (TCTI 1:1036 3:4; L; 21)

Further reading: DGS §28.6.

31. COPULAR CLAUSES

31.1. Basic structure of a copular clause

§154 A copular clause has three obligatory parts: a subject, a non-verbal predicate, and a form of the copula ***me*** 'be'. In addition, it may include one or more adjuncts. E.g.:

(267) **u$_4$-*ba* en-mete-*na*, ensi$_2$, lagas^{ki}-*kam***
u$_4$.d=be =ʔa en.mete.na.k ensi$_2$.k lagas =ak =ʔam
day =this=LOC Enmetena(ABS) ruler Lagash=GEN(ABS)=COP:3SG.S
'At this time Enmetena was the ruler of Lagash.' (RTC 16 6:3-5; L; 25)

This copular clause consists of a time adjunct (**u$_4$-*ba***), a subject (**en-mete-*na***), a predicative noun phrase in the absolutive case (**ensi$_2$ lagas^{ki}-*k***), and a form of the copula (***am***). The subject is here expressed twice: once by a noun phrase in the absolutive case (**en-mete-*na***) and once by the form of the copula (***-am***). However, the subject is always expressed by the form of the copula and need not be present as a full noun phrase:

(268) ***nu-ma*-kuš-*am$_6$***
nu.ma.kuš =ʔam
widow(ABS)=COP:3SG.S
'She is a widow.' (Nik 1:19 1:3; L; 24)

The non-verbal predicate is one of three types:

- a predicative noun phrase
- a predicative adjective
- a predicative numeral

A predicative noun phrase is usually in the absolutive case, but there is also a construction with one in the genitive case:

(269) **^{d}nanna-*kam*** (a proper name)
nanna=ak =ʔam
Nanna=GEN=COP:3SG.S
'He belongs to Nanna (lit. "he is of Nanna").' (TENS 280 3; D; 21)

The preceding three examples contain predicative noun phrases. Here is one with an predicative adjective:

(270) ***za-e* maḫ-*me-en***
za.e maḫ =me -en
you(ABS) great=COP-2SG.S
'You are great.' (Inanna C 218; OB)

And here is one with a predicative numeral:

(271) **pisaŋ-*be*$_2$ 8-*am*$_6$**
pisaŋ =be 8=ʔam
basket=3NH.POSS(ABS) 8=COP:3NH.S
'Its (number of) baskets is eight.' (DP 305 2:3; L; 24)

Further reading: DGS §29.1 and §§29.3-5.

31.2. The forms of the copula

§155 The copula ***me*** 'be' has independent and enclitic forms. The former are normal finite verbal forms with at least one verbal prefix. The latter have no prefixes and are attached to the last word of the copular clause. The following line contains an example of both types of form:

(272) **lu$_2$ *nu-me-en* dam diŋir-*ra-me-en***
lu$_2$ nu =i -me -en dam diŋir=ak =me -en
man(ABS) NEG=VP-COP-1SG.S husband god =GEN(ABS)=COP-1SG.S
'I am not (just) a man, I am the husband of a goddess.' (Dumuzi's Dream 206; OB)

The copula is inflected like an intransitive verb. Representing the prefixes of the independent copula by "...-", the basic forms of the copula are as in the following table:

Person	*Number*	*Class*	*Independent copula*	*Enclitic copula*
First person	singular	human	...-men	=men
Second person	singular	human	...-men	=men
Third person	singular	human	...-me	=ʔam
Third person	-	non-human		
First person	plural	human	...-menden	=menden
Second person	plural	human	...-menzen	=menzen
Third person	plural	human	...-meš	=meš

The form *=ʔam* of the enclitic copula is irregular. Its basic form is /ʔam/, which is written ***-am*$_6$**(AN) in Old Sumerian and ***-am*$_3$**(A.AN) later. After a clitic with a final vowel, its form is simply /m/. E.g.:

(273) **udu-*ŋu*$_{10}$-*um***
udu =ŋu =m
sheep=1SG.POSS(ABS)=COP:3NH.S
'They are my sheep.' (NG 120a 9; U; 21)

The copula does not have non-finite forms. The noun ***me*** 'essence, being' is generally thought to be cognate with the copula ***me*** 'be', but it is only used as a common noun, never as a verbal noun: it never occurs with a subject or a predicate.

Further reading: DGS §29.2.

31.3. Subordinate copular clauses

§156 Many subordinate copular clauses are just like the non-copular subordinate clauses treated in the preceding chapters. There are complement clauses:

(274) **ab$_2$ *ša-bar*-tur mu-*be$_2$ i$_3$-me-a***
ab$_2$ =ak ša.bar.tur mu =be i -me-ʔa
cow=GEN Shabartur(ABS) name=3NH.POSS(ABS) VP-COP-NMLZ
'that the cow's name was Shabartur' (NG 137 7; U; 21)

And there are adverbial clauses:

(275) **u$_4$ tu-*ra i$_3$-me-a***
u$_4$.d tu.r -ʔa i -me -ʔa =ʔa
day be.ill-NMLZ VP-COP-NMLZ=LOC
'when he was ill' (PDT 2:1171 rev 2; D; 21)

However, copular relative clauses are different from other relative clauses, because they normally lack the nominalizing suffix *-ʔa*. As a result, they look exactly like main clauses. E.g.:

(276) **ša$_3$-*ba* iti diri 6-*am$_3$ i$_3$*-ŋal$_2$**
ša$_3$.g =be =ʔa iti.d diri.g 6=ʔam i -n -ŋal$_2$
heart=3NH.POSS=LOC month extra 6=COP:3NH.S VP-in-be.there:PFV
'In this, there are six intercalary months. (Lit. "In its heart there are intercalary months which are six in number.")' (TRU 2 12; D; 21)

Such relative clauses may also lack an explicit head noun:

(277) **lugal-izim-*am$_3$*, *ma-an*-šum$_2$**
lugal.izim =ʔam ma -n -šum$_2$
Lugalizim(ABS)=COP:3SG.S 1SG.IO-3SG.A-give
'He, (who is) Lugalizim, gave them (= stolen sheep) to me.' (NG 127 4-5; U; 21)

After a copular relative clause, the case marker of the noun phrase is usually missing.

Further reading: DGS §29.6.

APPENDIX A: TOOLS

A.1. Bibliographies

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A.2. Grammars

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Edzard, D.O. 2003. *Sumerian grammar* (Handbook of oriental studies, Section one 71). Leiden: Brill.

Falkenstein, A. 1978. *Grammatik der Sprache Gudeas von Lagaš.* (Analecta Orientalia 28-29). Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum.
A posthumous re-edition of a highly influential grammar published in 1949-1950.

Jagersma, A.H. 2010. *A descriptive grammar of Sumerian*. Freely downloadable from: http://hdl.handle.net/1887/16107.
The grammar on which this introduction is based.

Michalowski, P. 2004. Sumerian. In: Roger D. Woodard (ed.) *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the world's ancient languages*, 19-59. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Poebel, A. 1923. *Grundzüge der sumerischen Grammatik* (Rostocker orientalische Studien I). Rostock: Selbstverlag des Verfassers.
The only grammar which all sumerologists accept as authoritative. It is in many respects out-of-date, but it has never been replaced in clarity or in scope.

Thomsen, M.-L. 1984. *The Sumerian language: an introduction to its history and grammatical structure* (Mesopotamia 10). Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag.
A widely used grammar that gives an excellent overview of the state of Sumerian grammatical studies in the early 1980s.

Zólyomi, G. 2005. Sumerisch. In: Michael P. Streck (ed.) *Sprachen des Alten Orients*, 11-43. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

A.3. Dictionaries

We still lack a comprehensive Sumerian dictionary. Establishing what a Sumerian word means can therefore be a major undertaking. These are good places to start:

Sjöberg, Å.W. (ed.) 1984-1998. *The Sumerian dictionary of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Babylonian Section of the University Museum.
Only four volumes were published: B (1984), A/I-III = a - ama_4 (1992-1998). It is abbreviated as PSD (*Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary*).

Tinney, S. (ed.) 2006. *The electronic PSD* (http://psd.museum.upenn.edu)
The electronic successor of the PSD. It is the most complete modern dictionary we have. It gives concise information on meanings and secondary literature, as well as links to attestations and other information. It is very useful but incomplete. Some words and meanings are absent, as well as much of the secondary literature.

Sallaberger, W. (ed.) 2006. *Leipzig-Münchner Sumerischer Zettelkasten*
Incomplete but very useful. Published online (see under further reading below).

Attinger, P. 2015. *Lexique sumérien-français*
A glossary of Sumerian literary texts from the Old Babylonian period. It is a work in progress. This version covers the complete vocabulary of about forty texts. Published online (http://www.arch.unibe.ch/attinger).

Black, J. and others 2006. *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL). Glossary* Published online (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/edition2/etcsllemma.php).
There is a separate Emesal glossary (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcslemesal.cgi).

Sommerfeld, W. (ed.) 2014. *Sumerische Glossare und Indizes (SGI). Belegsammlung.*
Perhaps the most comprehensive lexical index so far. It indexes the preceding three items and much more. Published online (http://dnms.org/apps/sgi).

Foxvog, D. A. 2014. *Elementary Sumerian Glossary*
As the author puts it: "A glossary suitable for the first several years of instruction." Published online (http://home.comcast.net/~foxvog/Glossary.pdf).

Many text editions contain a glossary, a word index, or an index of words discussed. For example:

Flückiger-Hawker, E. 1999. *Urnamma of Ur in Sumerian literary tradition*. Fribourg: Academic Press (pp. 300-361).

Lämmerhirt, K. 2012. *Die sumerische Königshymne Šulgi F*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (pp. 123-139).

Mittermayer, C. 2009. *Enmerkara und der Herr von Arata. Ein ungleicher Wettstreit.* Fribourg: Academic Press (pp. 348-378).

Some journals give a yearly word index. One of them is particularly important, because it is an index covering most of the Assyriological literature:

Archiv für Orientforschung. *Register Assyriologie. Wörter*.
The latest volume so far covers words treated in publications from 2002-2006: volume 52 (2011) 681-733. The Sumerian words from this register are indexed by Sommerfeld's *SGI* above.

Further reading: http://www.assyriologie.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/woerterbucher_und_lexika/sumglossar/index.html

A.4. Sign lists

There are several sign lists but none of them fully covers all main sign forms and readings. These are the most important ones, most of which can be downloaded from the internet:

aBZL = Mittermayer, C. 2006. *Altbabylonische Zeichenliste der sumerisch-literarischen Texte*. Fribourg: Academic Press.
Covers the forms and readings of the signs from a corpus of Old Babylonian Sumerian literary texts. Uses the new transliteration system of Attinger and Sallaberger.

KWU = Schneider, N. 1935. *Die Keilschriftzeichen der Wirtschaftsurkunden von Ur III nebst ihren charakteristischsten Schreibvarianten*. Rom: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut.
Covers the administrative texts from the Ur III period. Gives only sign forms and their equivalent in the Neo-Assyrian script. Is in many respects out of date and should only be consulted together with a more recent sign list, for example MesZL.

Labat = Labat, R. 1988. *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne. Signes, syllabaire, idéogrammes*. 6^{e} édition. Paris: Geuthner.
Primarily for students of Akkadian, but contains many Old Babylonian and earlier sign forms, as well as many Sumerian readings.

LAK = Deimel, A 1922. *Liste der archaischen Keilschriftzeichen*. Leipzig: Hinrichs.
Covers primarily the Fara texts but also includes signs from Lagash up to and including Gudea. Gives only sign forms and attestations but no readings, only the corresponding sign in the Neo-Assyrian script. Is in many respects out of date and should be consulted together with Krebernik, OBO 160/1 pp. 271-305.

MesZL = Borger, R. 2010. *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon*. Zweite, revidierte und aktualisierte Auflage. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.
Gives no early sign forms but has the most complete list of possible readings. *Kapitel II: Übersicht über die Keilschriftzeichen* is particularly useful for Sumerian, with its references to other sign lists, to discussions of individual signs, and to lexical texts.

RÉC = Thureau-Dangin, F. 1898. *Recherches sur l'origine de l'écriture cunéiforme*. Paris: Ernest Leroux.
Covers the then available Sumerian texts, nearly all of them from the third millennium BC, including the entire Gudea corpus. Gives only sign forms and attestations but no readings, only the corresponding sign in the Neo-Assyrian script.

RSP = Rosengarten, Y. 1967. *Répertoire commenté des signes présargoniques sumériens de Lagaš*. Paris: de Boccard.
Covers the forms and readings of the signs from the Old Sumerian texts from Lagash. Uses the uncommon transliteration system of Jestin.

A.5. History and culture

Encyclopedic reference works:

Black, J. and Green, A. 1992. *Gods, demons and symbols of ancient Mesopotamia. An illustrated dictionary*. London: The British Museum.

Reallexikon der Assyriologie (1928-...). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
As yet incomplete. Note that the oldest volumes are mostly out-of-date.

Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible, article 'Sumer', fascicules 72/73 (1999-2002) col. 77-359. Paris: Letouzey & Ané.

General overviews:

Bauer, J., Englund, R.K., Krebernik, M. 1998. *Mesopotamien. Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit* (OBO 160/1). Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag.

Charpin, D., Edzard, D.O., Stol, M. 2004. *Mesopotamien. Die altbabylonische Zeit* (OBO 160/4). Fribourg: Academic Press.

Crawford, H. (ed.) 2004. *Sumer and the Sumerians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
A primarily archaeological approach.

Crawford, H. (ed.) 2013. *The Sumerian world*. London: Routledge.
A collection of overview articles on selected topics.

Postgate, J.N. 1992. *Early Mesopotamia. Society and economy at the dawn of history.* London: Routledge.
Gives an overview of Mesopotamian society from ca. 3000-1500 BC, integrating both archaeological and textual data.

Roaf, M. 1990. *Cultural atlas of Mesopotamia and the ancient Near East*. New York: Facts On File.
A brief overview for the non-specialist with a much wider scope than the Sumerians alone.

Sallaberger, W., Westenholz, A. 1999. *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III Zeit* (OBO 160/3). Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag.

APPENDIX B: SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE GLOSSES

See DGS §1.3.2 for an explanation and overview of the more general notational conventions used in the examples and DGS pp. xviii-xxv for the abbreviations of the sources.

-	Separates affixes or stems from other affixes or stems in a word
=	Separates clitics from the other parts of a word
:	Separates multiple glosses for a single element
.	Separates the parts of a single gloss

1SG	First person singular human
2SG	Second person singular human
3SG	Third person singular human
1PL	First person plural human
2PL	Second person plural human
3PL	Third person plural human
3NH	Third person non-human
A	Transitive subject (mnemonic: ‘Agent’)
ABL	Ablative case
ABS	Absolutive case
ADV	Adverbiative case
CAT.NEG	Categorical negation
COM	Comitative case
COP	Copula
DAT	Dative case
DIR	Directive case
DO	Direct object
ERG	Ergative case
EQU	Equative case
GEN	Genitive case
IO	Indirect object
IPFV	Imperfective
LOC	Locative case (marker =*ʔa*)
LOC2	Locative case (marker =*ne*)
MID	Middle marker
MOD	Modal
NEG	Negative
NH	Non-human
NMLZ	Nominalizing suffix
OO	Oblique object
ORD	Ordinal
PFM	Preformative
PFV	Perfective
PL	Plural (nominal number)
PLUR	Plural event or state (verbal number)
POSS	Possessive pronoun
QUOT	Quotation suffix
RDP	Reduplication
REL.PAST	Relative past
S	Intransitive Subject (mnemonic: ‘Subject’)
SG	Singular (nominal number)

SING	Non-plural event or state (verbal number)
TERM	Terminative case
VENT	Ventive
VP	Vocalic prefix

APPENDIX C: DIAGRAM OF THE NOUN PHRASE

Head **(§28)**	***Modifiers***			***Phrase-final clitics*** **(§30)**		
	Adjective **(§§58-61)**	***Dependent genitive***	***Other modifiers*** **(§29)**	***Possessive pronoun*** **(§45)** **(see the table on p. 21)**	***Plural marker human*** **(§26)**	***Case marker*** **(§§31-44)** **(see the table on p. 18)**
NOUN	adjective	noun phrase in the genitive case	relative clause, apposition, numeral	**ŋu** = 1SG = '*my*' **zu** = 2SG = '*your*' **ane** = 3SG = '*his*, *her*' **be** = 3NH = '*its*, *their*' **mē** = 1PL = '*our*' **zunē(nē)** = 2PL = '*your*' **anēnē** = 3PL = '*their*' ***Demonstrative pronoun*** **(§46)** **e** = '*this*' **be** = '*this*' **še** = '*that*' **re** = '*that (far away)*'	**enē**	**ak** = GEN = genitive **e** = ERG = ergative **-** = ABS = absolutive **ra** = DAT = dative (human) **e** = DIR = directive (non-human) **ʔa** = LOC = locative **še** = TERM = terminative **ta** = ABL = ablative **da** = COM = comitative **eš** = ADV = adverbiative **gen** = EQU = equative

APPENDIX D: DIAGRAM OF THE VERB

<table>
<tr><th>Slot 1</th><th>Slot 2</th><th>Slot 3</th><th>Slot 4</th><th>Slot 5</th><th>Slot 6</th><th>Slot 7</th><th>Slot 8</th><th>Slot 9</th><th>Slot 10</th><th>Slot 11</th><th>Slot 12</th><th>Slot 13</th><th>Slot 14</th><th colspan="2">Slot 15</th><th>Slot 16</th></tr>
<tr><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th>set A</th><th>set B</th><th></th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="11">nu
ḫa</td><td rowspan="11">i
a
ū

na(n)
bara
ga

na
ši</td><td rowspan="11">nga</td><td rowspan="11">mu

ma

</td><td rowspan="5">3NH: b</td><td rowspan="5">1SG: ʔ
2SG: e
3SG: n

1PL: mē
2PL: enē
3PL: nnē</td><td rowspan="5">a
(ra)</td><td rowspan="11">da</td><td rowspan="11">ta</td><td rowspan="11">ši</td><td rowspan="11">ni
e</td><td rowspan="11">1SG: ʔ
2SG: e
3SG: n
3NH: b</td><td rowspan="11">STEM</td><td rowspan="11">ed</td><td rowspan="11">1SG: en
2SG: en
3SG: -
3NH: -
1PL: enden
2PL: enzen
3PL: eš</td><td rowspan="11">1SG: en
2SG: en
3SG: e
3NH: e
1PL: enden
2PL: enzen
3PL: enē</td><td rowspan="11">ʔa</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">(= 1SG.IO)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">MID/3NH.IO: ba</td><td rowspan="3">2SG.IO: ra
3SG.IO: nna</td></tr>
<tr></tr>
<tr></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">2SG.OO: ri
3SG.OO: nni</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">3NH.OO/3NH.on: bi</td></tr>
</table>

Morphemes are always found in a verbal form in the order of their slots (morphemes from slot 1 before those of 2-16, and so on).
Morphemes that belong to different slots can occur together in the same verbal form.
Morphemes that belong to the same slot cannot occur together in the same verbal form.

The table above only contains basic forms. Some of them undergo changes depending on what follows or precedes.