

Topicalized and external possessors in Sumerian

The writing system used for recording Sumerian relates to the spoken language not the same way as the modern alphabetical scripts.¹ For a grammatical description it is necessary to keep separate the language and the medium through which we have access to it. Accordingly, in the examples below (except for [1]–[4]) the first line represents the text in standard graphemic transliteration;² the second, a segmentation into reconstructed morphemes;³ the third, a morpheme by morpheme glossing; and the fourth, a translation.

Abbreviations used in the morphemic glosses: A = agent; ABS = absolutive case-marker ; CISL = cislocative prefix; DAT = dative case-marker or prefix; DN = divine name; ERG = ergative case-marker; GEN = genitive case-marker; GN = geographical name; H = human; LOC = locative case-marker or prefix; MIDDLE = middle prefix; MOD = modal prefix; NH = non-human; P= patient; OD = oblique-directive case-marker or prefix; OL = oblique-locative case-marker or prefix; PF = present-future tense; PL = plural marker; PN = personal name; POSS = possessive enclitic; S = subject; SUB = subordinator suffix; TN = temple name; 1SG = first person singular; 3NH = third person non-human; 3SG = third person singular human; 3PL = third person plural human.

Position 1	Position 2	Position 3	Position 4	Position 5
HEAD	MODIFIER	POSSESSOR	PLURAL-MARKER	CASE-MARKER

Table 1: The Sumerian nominal template

Slot 1	MODAL prefixes
Slot 2	COORDINATOR prefix
Slot 3	CISLOCATIVE (ventive) prefix
Slot 4	MIDDLE prefix or 3NH PRONOMINAL prefix (<i>specifying the person, gender and number of the first in the sequence of adverbial prefixes</i>)
Slot 5	PRONOMINAL prefix (<i>specifying the person, gender and number of the first in the sequence of adverbial prefixes</i>)
Slot 6	Adverbial I: DATIVE prefix
Slot 7	Adverbial II: COMITATIVE prefix
Slot 8	Adverbial III: ABLATIVE or TERMINATIVE prefix
Slot 9	Adverbial IV: LOCATIVE, OBLIQUE-LOCATIVE, or OBLIQUE-DIRECTIVE prefix
Slot 10	PRONOMINAL prefix (<i>referring to A or P, depending on the tense</i>)
Slot 11	STEM
Slot 12	PRESENT-FUTURE MARKER (<i>in intransitive verbs</i>)
Slot 13	PRONOMINAL suffix (<i>referring A, S, or P depending on the tense</i>)
Slot 14	SUBORDINATOR

Table 2: Sumerian verbal template

¹ For the writing system see Krebernik and Nissen 1994, and Coulmas 2002.

² Subscript numerals distinguish homophonic graphemes; graphemes that constitute a word are linked by hyphens, as are enclitics to their host.

³ In the second lines, subscript P1–5 and S1–14 refer to nominal and verbal structural positions respectively.

CASE ⁴	NOMINAL CASE-MARKER		VERBAL AFFIX	approx. meaning
	<i>human</i>	<i>non-human</i>		
ERGATIVE	-/e/	-/e/	pr. prefix (S10) ⁵ and/or pr. suffix (S13)	
ABSOLUTIVE	-/ø/	-/ø/	pr. prefix (S10) and pr. suffix (S13)	
ADVERBIAL CASES				
DATIVE	-/ra/	-/e/	/a/ (S6)	
OBLIQUE-DIRECTIVE	-/ra/	-/e/	/i/ (S9)	in(to) contact with
OBLIQUE-LOCATIVE	-/ra/	-/ʔ a /	/i/ (S9)	on(to)
LOCATIVE	—	-/ʔ a /	/ni/ (S9)	in(to)
TERMINATIVE	-/še/	-/še/	/ši/ (S8)	towards
ABLATIVE	—	-/ta/	/ta/ (S8)	from
COMITATIVE	-/da/	-/da/	/da/ (S7)	at, with
ADNOMINAL CASES				
GENITIVE	-/ak/	-/ak/	—	
EQUATIVE	-/gin/	-/gin/	—	like

Table 3: Sumerian case system

Normal genitive constructions

(1)

$p_1\text{ama}=p_3\text{ani}=p_5\text{ra}$
mother=POSS.3SG=DAT.H
“for his/her mother”

(2)

$p_1\text{ama}$ $p_3[p_1\text{dumu}=p_5\text{ak}]=p_5\text{ra}$
mother son=GEN=DAT.H
“for the mother of the son”

(3)

$p_1\text{ama}$ $p_3[p_1\text{dumu}$ $p_2\text{zid}=p_3\text{ani}=p_4\text{ene}=p_5\text{ak}]=p_5\text{ra}$
mother son true=POSS.3SG=PL=GEN=DAT.H
“for the mother of his true sons”

⁴ In the standard grammars of Sumerian (e.g., Thomsen 1984, and Attinger 1993) cases are identified according to their nominal case-markers. The system used here identifies cases on the basis both of their nominal and verbal marking which results in a considerably different system. For a description of the Sumerian case-system in these terms see Zólyomi 1999: 224–230 (using slightly different labels) and Zólyomi forthcoming.

⁵ Verbal structural positions will be referred to as “slots” (= S) throughout this talk to distinguish them from the structural positions of the noun phrase, referred to as “positions” (= P).

(4)

p_1 ama $p_3[p_1$ dumu p_2 zid $p_3[p_1$ lugal= p_5 ak]= p_4 enc= p_5 ak]= p_5 ra
mother son true king=GEN=PL=GEN=DAT.H
“for the mother of the king’s true sons”

Anticipatory genitive constructions

(5) Ent. 28 5:12–13⁶

nam-nun-da-ki- $\tilde{g}$ ar-ra, ur_2 -bi na_4 -a
 p_1 namnundaki $\tilde{g}$ ara= p_5 ak p_1 ur= p_3 bi= p_5 Ø na =a
GN=GEN base=POSS.3NH=ABS stone=LOC

mu-na-ni-du₃
 s_3 mu- s_5 nn- s_6 a- s_9 ni- s_{10} n- s_{11} du- s_{13} Ø
CISL-3SG-DAT-LOC-A.3SG-build-P.3NH

“He built him the base of the Namnunda-ki $\tilde{g}$ ara from stone”

(6) TCS 1 36: 3–4

Ur- $\tilde{g}$ iš tukul-ka, gu_4 -a-ni ga -na-ab-zig₃
 p_1 urtukulak= p_5 ak p_1 gu= p_3 ani= p_5 Ø s_1 ga- s_5 nn- s_6 a- s_{10} b- s_{11} zig
PN=GEN ox=POSS.3SG=ABS MOD-3SG-DAT-P.3NH-issue

“I want to issue Ur-tukula’s ox for him.”

(7) Gudea Cyl. A 17:11 (2.1.7)

e_2 -a d en-ki-ke₄ $\tilde{g}$ iš- $\tilde{h}$ ur-be₂
 p_1 c= p_5 ak enkik=c p_1 $\tilde{g}$ iš $\tilde{h}$ ur= p_3 bi= p_5 c
temple=GEN DN=ERG plan=3NH.POSS=OD.NH

si mu -na-sa₂
si=Ø s_3 mu- s_5 nn- s_6 a- s_9 -j-n-sa-Ø
horn=ABS CISL-3SG-DAT-OD-A.3SG-straighten-P.3NH

“The god Enki put right the design of the temple for him.”

(8) Bar-Am 366/qof 1–3⁷

Ur- d šul-pa-e₃-ka, $ensi_2$ -ke₄, gu_4 apin 1-am₃
 p_1 uršulpaek= p_5 ak $ensik$ =e gu apin=ak 1=am-Ø
PN=GEN ruler=ERG ox plough=GEN one=COP-S.3NH

šu-ne₂ ba-an-šum₂
 p_1 šu= p_3 ani= p_5 c s_4 b- s_6 a- s_{10} n- s_{11} šum- s_{13} Ø
hand=3SG.POSS=DAT.NH 3NH-DAT-A.3SG-give-P.3NH

“The ruler entrusted (lit.gave to his hand) Ur-Šulpae with one plough-ox”

⁶ The inscriptions of Ean. (= Eanatum), En. I (= Enanatum), and Ent. (= Entemena), are numbered here according to Steible 1982. The administrative texts quoted as AWL + no. are numbered according to Bauer 1972. The letter-order TCS 1 36 is from Sollberger 1966. Literary texts are quoted after the edition of the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (Black et al. 1998–); the number in brackets is the composition’s catalogue number in the corpus.

⁷ The text was published in Malul 1989:146–147.

(9) Gudea Statue B 8:39–42

gu ₃ -de ₂ -a,	ensi ₂ ,	lagaš ^{ki} -ka,
<u>P₁gudea</u>	<u>P₁ensi</u>	<u>P₃[P₁lagaš=P₅ak]=P₅ak</u>
PN	ruler	GN=GEN=GEN

lu ₂	inim-ni	ib-kur ₂ -a
<u>P₁lu</u>	<u>P₂[P₁inim=P₃ani=P₅∅]</u>	<u>S₁₀ib-S₁₁kur-S₁₃c-S₁₄'a]=P₅∅</u>
man	word=3SG.POSS=ABS	P.3NH-change-A.3SG-SUB=ABS

“the man who changes the orders of Gudea, the ruler of Lagaš ...”

(10) Gudea Cyl A 29:14–17 (2.1.7)

e ₂ -a	ni ₂	gal-bi,	kalam-ma	mu-ri,
<u>P₁c=P₅ak</u>	<u>P₁ni</u>	<u>P₂gal=P₃bi=P₅∅</u>	<u>kalam='a</u>	<u>S₃mu-S₉n-S₁₁ri-S₁₃∅</u>
house=GEN	fear	great=3NH.POSS=ABS	land=LOC	CISL-LOC-settle-S.3NH

ka-tar-ra-bi,	kur-re	ba-ti
<u>P₁katara=P₃bi=P₅∅</u>	<u>kur=e</u>	<u>S₄b-S₆a-S₁₁ti-S₁₃∅</u>
praise=3NH.POSS=ABS	highlands=DAT.NH	3NH-DAT-reach-S.3NH

The house’s great awesomeness settles upon the Land, its praise reaches to the highlands,”

External possession constructions

(11)
Die Mutter wusch dem Kind die Haare.
“The mother washed the child’s hair”

Identically marked external possession constructions⁸

(12) Ean. 6 4:13-15

^d nin-ġir ₂ -su-ra,	a-šag ₄ ašag	ki aḡ ₂ -ni,
<u>P₁ningirsuk=P₅ra</u>	<u>ašag</u>	<u>kiaḡ=ani=∅</u>
DN=OL.H	field	beloved=POSS.3SG=ABS

šu-na	mu-ni-gi ₄
<u>P₁šu=P₃ani=P₅'a</u>	<u>S₃mu-S₅nn-S₉i-S₁₀n-S₁₁gi-S₁₃∅</u>
hand=POSS.3SG=OL.NH	CISL-3SG-OL-A.3SG-return-P.3NH

“He (= Eannatum) has returned (lit. ‘returned to his hand’) his beloved field to Ningirsu”

(13) AWL 81 5:1-4

en-ig-gal,	nu-banda ₃ ,	e ₂	zag	iri-ka-ka,
eniggal	nubanda=e	e	zag	iri=ak=ak='a
PN	overseer=ERG	house	border	city=GEN=GEN=LOC

šu=a	bi ₂ -gi ₄
<u>šu='a</u>	<u>S₄b-S₉i-S₁₀n-S₁₁gi-S₁₃∅</u>
hand=OL.NH	3NH-OL-A.3SG-return-P.3NH

“Eniggal, the overseer has delivered (lit. ‘returned to hand’) them (= various sorts of wood) in the house at the border of the city”

⁸ I owe the terms to McGregor (1999) who distinguishes Identically and Differently Marked Constructions in Nyulnyulan languages.

(14) Ean. 1 4:24-26

^dnin-hur-saḡ-ra, dug₃ zid-da-na, mu-ni-tuṣ
ninḡsaḡ=ra dug zid-a=ani=’a s₃mu-s₅nn-s₉i-s₁₀n-s₁₁tuṣ-s₁₃∅
DN=OL.H knee right-PT=POSS.3SG=OL.NH CISL-3SG-OL-A3.SG-sit-P.3SG
“She (= Inana) has made him (= Eanatum) sit on the right knee of the goddess Ninḡsaḡ
”

(15) AWL 183 3:1-4

šubur, nu-banda₃, gu₂-ne-ne-a, e-ne-ḡar
šubur nubanda=e gu=anene=’a s₅enne-s₉j-s₁₀n-s₁₁ḡar-s₁₃∅
PN overseer=ERG neck=POSS.3PL=OL.NH 3PL-OL-A.3SG-put-P.3NH
“Šubur, the overseer, has entered it (= a given amount of silver) as their (= 3 fishermen)
debt” (literally, “put them on their neck”)

(16) En. I 33 2:13–3:6

kur-kur šu-ni-še₃, mu-še₃-ḡar-ra-a
kur~kur=∅ šu=ani=še s₃mu-s₅n-s₈ši-s₉n-s₁₀ḡar-s₁₃∅-s₁₄’a-’a
country~PL=ABS hand-POSS.3SG-TERM CISL-3SG-TERM-A.3SG-put-P.3NH-SUB-LOC
“When he (= Lugal-URUxKÁR) has given all the foreign lands into his (= Enannatum’s)
hands”

(17) Išme-Dagan W (2.5.4.23) A38-40

šag₄-zu u₁₈-ru-me-en, bar-zu, ni₂ gur₃-ru-me-en
šag=zu=∅ uru=me-en bar=zu=∅ ni gur-ed=me-en
heart=POSS.2SG=ABS huge=COP=S.2SG outside=POSS.2SG=ABS fear carry-PF=COP-S.2SG
“Your (= Nibru) interior is enormous, your exterior is imbued with fearsomeness”

(18) Iddin-Dagan D (2.5.3.4) 30

igi-zu huš-me-en za-pa-l aḡ₂-zu^l ṽmaḡ[?]-me-en^l
igi=zu=∅ huš=me-en zapaḡ=zu=∅ maḡ=me-en
face=POSS.2SG=ABS awesome=COP-2SG.S cry=POSS.2SG-ABS majestic=COP-2SG.S
“Your face is awesome, your cry is majestic”

Differently marked external possession constructions

(19) Išme-Dagan A (2.5.4.01) 90

^dutu niḡ₂-si-sa₂ inim gen₆-na ka-ḡa₂
utu=e niḡsisa inim gen-’a=∅ ka=ḡu=’a
DN=ERG justice word firm-PT=ABS mouth=POSS.1SG=LOC

ḡa-ma-ni-in-ḡar
s₁ḡa-s₃m-s₆a-s₉ni-s₁₀n-s₁₁ḡar-s₁₃∅
MOD-CISL-DAT-LOC-A.3SG-put-P.3NH

“The god Utu put justice and reliable words in my mouth.”
“Utu legte mir Gerechtigkeit und zuverlässige Worte in den Mund”

(20) Išme-Dagan Q (2.5.4.17) 5

ḡidru kug šu-za ma-ra-ni-in-ge-en
ḡidru kug=∅ šu=zu=’a s₃ma-s₅i-s₆a-s₉ni-s₁₀n-s₁₁gen-s₁₃∅
sceptre holy=ABS hand=POSS.2SG=LOC CISL-2SG-DAT-LOC-A.3SG-firmly.put-P.3NH
“He has firmly put the holy sceptre in your hand.”
“Er legte dir das heiligen Zepter fest in die Hand”

(21) Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta (1.8.2.3) 433–434

en-e ki $\tilde{g}_2$ -gi $_4$ -a kur-še $_3$ du-ur $_2$
en=e ki $\tilde{g}$ gia kur=še du=ra
lord=ERG messenger mountain=TERM go.PF-DAT.H

ḡidru šu-na mu-un-na-ḡa $_2$ -ḡa $_2$
ḡidru=ø šu=ani=’a s $_3$ mu-s $_5$ ṁn-s $_6$ a-s $_9$ n-s $_{11}$ ḡa~ḡa-s $_{13}$ e
sceptre=ABS hand=POSS.3SG=LOC C1SL-3SG-DAT-LOC-put~PF-A.3SG

“The lord placed the sceptre in the hands of the messenger going to the mountains.”

	PR’S POSITION	PR’S CASE	VERBAL CROSS-REFERENCING
NORMAL	behind the PM	genitive	no
AGC	in topic position	genitive	no
LEXICAL EPC	in topic position	that of PM, or dative	yes

Table 4: Types of genitive constructions in terms of structure

	TOPICALITY	INTERNAL POSSESSION	EXTERNAL POSSESSION
NORMAL	–	+	–
AGC	+	+	–
LEXICAL EPC	+	–	+

Table 5 Types of genitive constructions in terms of notional features

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