

## The Sumerian Equative Case\*

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Sumerian was spoken in ancient Mesopotamia up to the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, but its written tradition lasted much longer: even in the second half of the first millennium we find texts written in Sumerian. As Sumerian is an isolated language, the reconstruction of its grammatical system as well as the interpretation of the written records is not a straightforward process. Sumerian is an agglutinative language with a rich case system: eleven distinct case markers can be identified on the basis of the texts available. The present paper focuses on the different uses and the semantics of one of these cases, the equative.

Blake proposes a broader definition for the term *case* as ‘a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads. Traditionally the term refers to inflectional marking, and, typically, case marks the relationship of a noun to a verb at the clause level or of a noun to a preposition, postposition or another noun at the phrase level.’ (Blake 1994: 1) This broader interpretation is necessary if one wants to analyze the Sumerian equative as a case marker, as it is not an inflection but an enclitic.

In the linguistic literature, the equative case, sometimes also called *similitative*, is claimed to express similarity with something as a rule (Haspelmath 2009: 515). A closely related category is the *comparative case*, which marks the standard of comparison in constructions expressing inequality (Haspelmath 2009: 511). The *essive case* is also worth mentioning here: it refers to a temporary state of being (Crystal 1998: 122), and often has predicative function as well (Haspelmath 2009: 514). As the term ‘essive’ has several different uses in the linguistic literature, it is worth clarifying its present use through concrete examples: a temporary state of being is exemplified by constructions such as *He works as a doctor* or *I’m telling you this as your mother*.

These types of case are cross-linguistically rare. In addition to Sumerian, the equative case is attested in Ossetic (Kulikov 2009: 447), Sje, Yamphu, some Australian languages (Haspelmath 2009: 515) and a dialect of Inuit, Greenlandic Eskimo (Blake 1994: 39, on the basis of Hjelmslev), among

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others. The comparative case is known from Dumi, Chantyal (Haspelmath 2009: 515), and from some of the Dagesthanian languages (Daniel & Ganenkov 2009: 637). The essive is the most common of the three types: it can be found in Estonian (Fodor 1999: 366), Finnish (Fodor 1999: 406) and Hungarian, to cite just a few examples. These languages are all characterized by a rich case system and are mainly agglutinative (even Ossetic, which belongs to the Indo-European languages).

In the following, I refer to the Sumerian case-marker as equative regardless of its true semantic function, as this is the term used in Sumerology. I do, however, make a distinction between the case-morpheme and its semantic interpretation: similitive meaning is assigned to the case marker when expressing similarity, equative meaning when expressing the comparison of equal values, and essive meaning when expressing a temporary state of being. Though the comparative meaning has been also mentioned in constructions expressing inequality, there are no examples for such a meaning of the Sumerian equative case.

## 2 USES OF THE SUMERIAN EQUATIVE CASE

The Sumerian equative most often expresses similarity. Example (1) illustrates this use; other similar examples could easily be found in the literary corpus.

- (1) Lugalzagesi I ii 30–32 (Umma, 24th century BC)  
 urim<sub>2</sub><sup>ki</sup>-e gu<sub>4</sub>-gin<sub>7</sub> sag an-še<sub>3</sub>  
 GN=e gu=gin sag=∅ an=še  
 Ur=ERG bull=EQ head=ABS sky=TERM  
 mu-dab<sub>6</sub>-il<sub>2</sub>  
 mu-n-da-b-il-∅  
 VEN-3H-COM-3NH.A-rise.PT-3SG.P  
 ‘Ur raised his head to the sky like a bull.’

The equative case frequently occurs in comparative constructions marking the standard of comparison. These constructions always express some type of equivalence between the NPs unlike the case-morphemes called comparative in other languages. The equative meaning of the case is exemplified below:

- (2) Šulgi D 15 [ETCSL 2.4.2.04] (Old Babylonian)  
a-ba za-gin<sub>7</sub> šag<sub>4</sub>-ta ġeštug<sub>2</sub>-ga šu daġal  
aba=ra za=gin šag=ta ġeštug='a šu daġal=∅  
who=LOC you=EQ womb=ABL ear=LOC hand wide=ABS

mu-ni-in-dug<sub>4</sub>  
mu-ni-n-dug-∅  
VEN-LOC-3SG.LOC-do.PT-3SG.P

‘Who is from birth as richly endowed with understanding as you?’<sup>1</sup>

Example (3) shows that the equative case may also express a temporary state of being, although it is important to emphasize that the essive use is quite uncommon in Sumerian, or at least not frequently attested in the available texts.

- (3) Gudea Cyl. A, xiv 5–6 (Lagaš, 22nd century BC)  
sipad zid gu<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>2</sub>-a hul<sub>2</sub>-la-gin<sub>7</sub>  
sipad zid gudea=∅ hul-'a=gin  
shepherd true Gudea=ABS happy-PT-EQ

im-ma-na-ni-ib<sub>2</sub>-šar  
i-mu-nn-a-ni-b-šar-∅  
FIN-VEN-3H-DAT-LOC-3NH.A-place.PT-3SG.P

‘This made the true shepherd Gudea happy.’

In this example the enclitic marks a non-finite verbal form instead of a noun. In Sumerian a non-finite verb may in itself fulfill the role of a NP. This feature is found in many other languages; according to Spencer (2009: 189), ‘it’s common to find that adjectives can be inflected as though they were nouns provided they function as nouns. Case marking is also very common on verbs, especially, but not exclusively, on non-finite or nominalized forms of verbs, generally giving rise to words functioning as adjuncts.’ The role of the non-finite verbal forms is of particular importance in Sumerian, since adjectives constitute a small and limited class among the lexical categories of Sumerian (Black 2002: 72), and the role of adjectives is fulfilled mostly by non-finite verbs.

### 3 LANGUAGES IN CONTACT: SUMERIAN AND AKKADIAN

Sumerian and Akkadian, a Semitic language spoken in ancient Mesopotamia, had definitely been in contact before the appearance of the first writ-

ten records from the region. The close relation between the two languages resulted in borrowings and grammatical interference.

The Akkadian morpheme with a set of meanings similar to those of the Sumerian equative is the preposition *kīma*. In the Akkadian construction the noun after the preposition is in the genitive. The relevance of the comparison of inflectional case markers and adpositions is highlighted by Blake (1994), Haspelmath (2009: 509) and Johanson (2009: 494)<sup>2</sup> among others. These authors do not restrict the definition of case to inflectional categories, since analytical means of expression (i.e. adpositions and clitics) can also fulfill a similar function.

Besides the similarity in meaning, the Akkadian and Sumerian morphemes also show some resemblance in their phonetic shape, which might reflect direct borrowing. The question thus arises, which of them was the source. Steiner assumes that the Akkadian is the original, and calls the Sumerian equative a ‘pseudo case morpheme’ (Steiner 2003: 631). His assumption seems to be supported by the fact that the Akkadian preposition has a clear etymology: it consists of the preposition *kī* and the emphatic particle *-ma* (Deutscher 2000: 38). But since the equative is attested in Sumerian as early as the Early Dynastic period, the subsequent semantic development of the morpheme might have been independent from that of the Akkadian preposition.

The diachronic evaluation of the data related to the uses of the Sumerian equative shows that its meanings discussed above are equally attested in the Early Dynastic (c. 3000–2350 BC) and the Ur III (2112–2004 BC) periods, when Sumerian was still a spoken language. The appearance of the morpheme with its full set of meanings in the Early Dynastic texts suggests that it was an early loan from Akkadian.<sup>3</sup> Although none of the meanings of the equative case are restricted to the Old Babylonian period (c. 2000–1595 BC) – when Sumerian had no native speakers left, and the transmission of the language was bound to native Akkadians – it may still be possible that its use in Sumerian was influenced by Akkadian.

The Sumerian equative case is usually discussed as one of the adnominal cases. Sumerian has two adnominal cases, the genitive and the equative. The common feature of these two cases is that they are marked only on the NP, without a corresponding element in the verbal prefix chain.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>2</sup>Johanson even refers to the correspondence between Dravidan case suffixes and Indic postpositions as an example.

<sup>3</sup>Such early loans are hard to recognize; the conjunction particle /u/ used to be cited as an example.

<sup>4</sup>In Sumerian, we can distinguish several adverbial or relational cases beyond the adnominal cases. The adverbial cases may have a corresponding element in the verbal prefix

structure of the genitive and the equative construction, however, differs significantly. In the genitive construction, the case marker of the head is attached to the phrase after the genitive case marker, that is, when the head is followed by modifiers it is not directly linked to the lexical head.

- (4) Eannatum 2, vi 12–14 (Lagaš, 25th century BC)  
 $e_2$ -an-na-tum<sub>2</sub> ensi<sub>2</sub> lagaš<sup>ki</sup>-ke<sub>4</sub>  
 eannatum ensi lagaš=ak=e  
 RN ruler GN=GEN=ERG  
 ‘Eannatum, ruler of Lagaš’

Other modifiers of the head can also be placed similarly between the head and the case marker:

- (5) Lugalzagesi I, ii 4–5 (Umma, 24th century BC)  
 im-bi ki dadag-ga-a  
 im=bi=∅ ki dadag=’a  
 clay=3NH.POSS=ABS place pure=LOC2  
 im-mi-lu  
 im-b-i-n-lu-∅  
 VEN-3NH-LOC2-3H.A-mix.PT-3NH.P  
 ‘He mixed its clay in a pure place.’

The noun marked with the equative case is, however, different. Example (1), repeated below in (6), clearly shows that the case marker of the head noun precedes the dependent noun.

- (6) Lugalzagesi I ii 30–32 (Umma, 24th century BC)  
 urim<sub>2</sub><sup>ki</sup>-e gu<sub>4</sub>-gin<sub>7</sub> sag an-še<sub>3</sub>  
 GN=e gu=gin sag=∅ an=še  
 Ur=ERG bull=EQ head=ABS sky=TERM  
 mu-dab<sub>6</sub>-il<sub>2</sub>  
 mu-n-da-b-il-∅  
 VEN-3H-COM-3NH.A-rise.PT-3SG.P  
 ‘Ur raised his head to the sky like a bull.’

The differences between the two constructions become even clearer if we apply Zólyomi’s (2005: 7) model of the Sumerian nominal phrase to equatives. Zólyomi states that

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chain, though the conditions under which these elements appear are still not clear. The adnominal cases, however, are never co-referential with any of the verbal prefixes (Heimpel 1968: 26. f. 3).

The Sumerian noun phrase consists of five structural positions. P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> may be occupied with a variety of structural units. P<sub>3</sub> may be filled either with a noun phrase in the genitive or with a possessive pronominal enclitic. The elements occurring in P<sub>4</sub> and P<sub>5</sub> are enclitics, i.e. affixes being added to phrases but not to lexical heads.

According to this model, P<sub>1</sub> can be filled by the head noun, P<sub>2</sub> by a modifier, P<sub>3</sub> by a NP in the genitive or by a possessive pronominal enclitic, P<sub>4</sub> by the plural enclitic and P<sub>5</sub> by the case marker of the head. The NP in P<sub>3</sub> may also have all its five structural positions filled. If one supposes that the NP in the equative is a modifier of a head similarly to the NP in the genitive, then its position should be between P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>4</sub>. However, such a construction is not attested: the NP marked with the equative case always constitutes a separate NP.

The differences between the two structures are illustrated below:

- (7) a. Genitive construction: [P<sub>1</sub> P<sub>3</sub> [P<sub>1</sub>-P<sub>5</sub><sub>GEN</sub>]-P<sub>5</sub><sub>α</sub>]  
 b. Equative construction: [P<sub>1</sub>-P<sub>5</sub><sub>α</sub>] [P<sub>1</sub>-P<sub>5</sub><sub>EQ</sub>]

The distinct behaviour of the NP in the equative case may well be a consequence of its Akkadian origin; its different position could thus be the result of structural interference. The Akkadian preposition changed into an enclitic in line with the morphological structure of Sumerian but the independence of the NP was preserved. However, the term ‘pseudo case morpheme’ would be inappropriate because the noun in the equative is not marked with any other case-marker, not even that of its head. This corresponds to the behaviour of prepositions in Akkadian, where double prepositions are not allowed: *kīma* can express *kīma ina*, *kīma eli*, *kīma ana*, etc. (GAG II4g\*). Sumerian does not allow double case marking, either. Similarly, other noun-verb relations expressed by cases in Sumerian have their Akkadian equivalents in the form of adpositions (e.g. the dative and the locative).

There is a neutral term *copying* for the process of borrowing the Sumerian equative case marker from Akkadian (Johanson 2009: 494).<sup>5</sup> Although the change in the position of the copied Akkadian preposition is obvious since it follows the noun it refers to, it is much less clear whether the resulting morpheme in Sumerian is an adposition, an affix or a clitic. There exist a number of examples for the copying of prepositions as postpositions

<sup>5</sup>According to Johanson (2009: 497), ‘copying is not a grammaticalization process. Grammaticalization proceeds unidirectionally from less to more grammaticalized items. Fresh copies, however, mostly represent less advanced stages than their models. Their use is often pragmatically determined, contextually restricted, and optional rather than obligatory.’

(Johanson 2009: 499), but as there are no postpositions in Sumerian, this seems unlikely in this particular case. It seems relatively easy to make a decision between the morphological level of affixes and clitics, since the structure of the NP in the equative is parallel to that of the NPs discussed above, that is, the case marker appears at the phrase level as an enclitic:

- (8) Enki and Ninhursaĝa, 84 [ETCSL 1.1.1] (Old Babylonian)  
*i*<sub>3</sub> li-gin<sub>7</sub> *i*<sub>3</sub> li-gin<sub>7</sub> *i*<sub>3</sub> he-nun-na-gin<sub>7</sub>  
*i* li=gin *i* li=gin *i* henun=ak=gin  
 oil fine=EQ oil fine=EQ oil plenty=GEN=EQ  
 ‘like fine oil, like fine oil, like oil of abundance’

However, there are some examples that show that the position of the equative case marker is not stable within the NP. The comparison of (9) and (10) below clearly demonstrates that the case marker can both precede and follow the modifier of its head in similar expressions.

- (9) Lisin’s song [UET 6/1, 144], 36-37 (Old Babylonian)  
 usar-gin<sub>7</sub> nu-tuku *ni*<sub>2</sub>-te-ĝu<sub>10</sub>-š<sub>e</sub><sub>3</sub> ga-gu<sub>7</sub>  
 usar=gin nu-tuku nite=ĝu=š<sub>e</sub> ga-ø-gu  
 neighbor=EQ NEG-have own=IH=TERM MOD-3NH.P-eat.PT  
 ‘Like someone without a neighbour, I eat alone...  
 ma-la-gin<sub>7</sub> nu-tuku *ni*<sub>2</sub>-te-ĝu<sub>10</sub>-š<sub>e</sub><sub>3</sub> ga-nag  
 malag=gin nu-tuku nite=ĝu=š<sub>e</sub> ga-ø-nag  
 neighbor=EQ NEG-have own=IH=TERM MOD-3NH.P-drink.PT  
 ... like someone without a friend, I drink alone.’
- (10) Inana’s descent to the nether world, 39 [ETCSL 1.4.1]  
 (Old Babylonian)  
 mu-lu nu-tuku-gin<sub>7</sub> tug<sub>2</sub> dili-a mur<sub>10</sub>-ma-ab  
 mulu nu-tuku=gin tug dili=’a mur-m-ba-b  
 person NEG-have=EQ garment single=LOC dress.IMV-VEN-MID-3NH.P  
 ‘Like a pauper, clothe yourself in a single garment.’

#### 4 THE SUMERIAN EQUATIVE AS A SENTENCE ADVERBIAL

There is another possible explanation for the behavior of the Sumerian equative: the NP marked with the equative case might be a sentence adverbial rather than the modifier of another NP.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>I owe thanks to Gábor Zólyomi for this suggestion.

There are a few examples demonstrating a possible path for the emergence of the structure of the NP marked with the Sumerian equative. Krebernik (1998: 260) argues that originally not only one of the NPs, but both were marked with the equative morpheme as in the following example from an Early Dynastic proverb:

- (II) Proverb (Early Dynastic Period)  
 ka-zu<sub>5</sub>-gin<sub>7</sub>                      gala<sub>4</sub>-zu<sub>5</sub>-gin<sub>7</sub>  
 ka=zu=gin                              gala=zu=gin  
 mouth=2H.POSS=EQ vulva=2H.POSS=EQ  
 ‘As is your mouth, so is your vulva.’

According to Krebernik, this structure changed in later periods and the second equative morpheme was dropped from the NP. Moreover, this change might have occurred under the influence of Akkadian: ‘In späteren Textzeugen fällt das zweite -gin<sub>7</sub> weg – analog zu und wohl beeinflusst von der akkadischen Ausdrucksweise “kīma pī-ki bissur-ki” [In later texts the second -gin<sub>7</sub> disappeared – similar to and maybe influenced by the Akkadian construction “kīma pī-ki bissur-ki” – SzS] (Krebernik 1998: 260). As opposed to the aforementioned Akkadian influence, this path would be the result of an independent Sumerian innovation.

As a sentence adverbial, the NP marked with the equative would not modify another NP, but the whole phrase. Since in this case it is not linked to the VP directly, its structure, which is completely distinct both from the adverbial and adnominal cases, could be explained.

There is one more piece of evidence which strengthens the arguments for the use of the equative case to build sentence adverbials. Heimpel (1968: 37) already recognized that on some occasions the NP marked with the equative case is the first element of the phrase, and that it might even anticipate the NP it is referring to. However, this structure is rare in Sumerian; examples containing both of the NPs are not frequent either, as the NP marked with the adverbial case is often replaced by a pronoun.

- (I2) Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave, 166 [ETCSL 1.8.2.1]  
 (Old Babylonian)  
 še-gin<sub>7</sub>    sahar sis-a  
 še=gin    sahar sis-‘a=∅  
 barley=EQ dust bitter-PT=ABS  
  
 nam-ba-da-b-gu<sub>7</sub>-e  
 nam-b-a-da-b-gu-e  
 MOD.NEG-3NH-DAT-COM-3NH.P-eat.PT-3H.A  
 ‘Don’t make me eat saltpetre as if it were barley!’



The position of sentence adverbials is one of their most important characteristics. They are normally located at the beginning of the phrase – only the topic and sometimes the specified subject can precede them (cf. (1)).

In the case of Sumerian it is usually not possible to set up straightforward restrictions on where the NP marked with the equative case can be located within the phrase. Most of the examples for the use of the equative case come from literary texts. This corpus was, however, mostly composed during the Old Babylonian period, by which time Akkadian had already replaced Sumerian as the vernacular. It is hard to establish a clear pattern, because the corpus might contain agrammatical sentences. Moreover, syntactic rules used to be applied more freely in literary texts. For this reason, this interpretation of the function of the equative cannot be proved or refuted.

## 5 GRAMMATICALIZATION OF THE CASE MARKER

To find the exact order in which the different meanings of the Sumerian equative came by, the first step is to identify the primary meaning of the case marker. The development of the Akkadian preposition might provide useful hints, as the two languages were in close contact. According to Deutscher, the three core meanings of Akkadian *kīma* already attested in the Old Akkadian period (2334–2193 BC) are the equative, the temporal and the causal uses. Based on data from other Semitic languages, also reinforced by general patterns of linguistic development, it seems likely that the preposition originally corresponded to the equative, and the other two semantic ranges emerged later. Another piece of evidence supporting this theory is that the equative meaning belongs to the preposition, while the temporal and causal meanings are bound to the conjunction *kīma*, from which the preposition must be considered earlier (Deutscher 2000: 38). In the case of Sumerian, if we take the equative meaning as primary, probably borrowed from Akkadian, the extension of this meaning to expressing similarity and a temporary state of being seems to be plausible.

Deutscher (2000: 37–65) discusses in detail how the adverbial use of the Akkadian preposition *kīma* emerged, and how this causal-adverbial construction underwent a semantic weakening process during the Old Babylonian period, called ‘bleaching’ (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 2), resulting in the development of a finite complementizer. The evolution of complex structures of complementation succeeding parataxis, however, was of Sumerian origin (Black & Zólyomi 2000: 14) and had no correspondence with the semantic development of the equative case morpheme in Sumerian. The development of the Sumerian case marker is most probably independent from that of the Akkadian preposition.

The use of the equative case marker *-/gin/* was extended in Sumerian resulting in some expressions deducible from its primary meaning.

- (13) Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world, 254 [ETCSL 1.8.1.4]  
(Old Babylonian)

igi bi<sub>2</sub>-du<sub>8</sub>-am<sub>3</sub>  
igi=∅ b-i-y-duh-∅-am  
eye=ABS 3NH-LOC-IH.A-loosen.PT-3SG.P-COP

‘I saw him.’

a-na-gin<sub>7</sub> an-ak  
ana=gin a-n-ak-∅  
what=EQ FIN-3H.A-do.PT-3SG.P

‘How does he fare?’

- (14) Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, 235 [ETCSL 1.8.2.3]  
(Old Babylonian)

šeg<sub>12</sub> kul-aba<sub>4</sub><sup>ki</sup>-a-ka ur<sub>5</sub>-gin<sub>7</sub>  
šeg GN=ak=’a ur=gin  
brickwork Kulaba=GEN=LOC that=EQ

hu-mu-na-ab-be<sub>2</sub>  
ha-mu-nn-a-b-e-e  
MOD-VEN-3H-DAT-3NH.P-speak.PF-3SG.A

‘In brick-built Kulaba she (Inana) speaks to him thus.’

The relation of the equative case to these adverbial expressions is transparent and attested in other languages as well. The grammaticalization of the German question word *wie* as the preposition applied in similes or as the conjunction marking the standard of comparison in comparative constructions (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 177–178) is just as well-known as the nonverbatim quotative use of the English comparative conjunction *like* (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 274). The Sumerian equative case marker, however, never became a morpheme deriving adverbs from nouns and non-finite verbal forms, since the suffix *-/bi/* and another Akkadian loan, the adverbial suffix *-/eš/* had already fulfilled this role (see Zólyomi 2005: 17).

Finally, the Sumerian *-/gin/* morpheme can appear as an adverbializer at the phrase level. It is possible to explain this phenomenon as bleaching if we consider the morpheme to have come from a case marker. The grammaticalization of case markers as a morpheme marking a type of subordinate clause is attested in many languages (Heine 2009: 468).

The Sumerian *-/gin/* appears as an adverbial subordinator without losing its comparative meaning:

- (15) Lugalbanda and the Anzud bird, 237 [ETCSL 1.8.2.2]  
 (Old Babylonian)  
 a-bi                      a-gin<sub>7</sub>    mu-e-naĝ-a-gin<sub>7</sub>  
 a=bi=∅                  a=gin    mu-y-naĝ-∅-'a-gin  
 water=POSS.3NH=ABS thus=EQ VEN-2H.A-drink-3SG.P-SUB-EQ  
 mu-e-bal-e  
 mu-y-bal-eš  
 VEN-2H.A-turn.PT-3PL.P  
 'Did you cross their waters as if you were drinking them?'

However, as an adverbializer, *-/gin/* has a broader use, including also temporal (16) and causal (17) relative clauses. In these cases, the process of bleaching is clearly perceptible, although the temporal aspect of its use is still in close relationship with the primary meaning of the morpheme.

- (16) Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world, Urim version (UET 6 60),  
 14–15  
 bi<sub>2</sub>-in-dug<sub>4</sub>-ga-gin<sub>7</sub>-nam  
 b-i-n-dug-∅-'a-gin-am  
 3NH-LOC-3H.A-say.PT-3SG.P-SUB-EQ-COP  
 'As soon as he had said that. . .  
 dumu ĝir<sub>2</sub>-suki-a      zag      bi<sub>2</sub>-in-tag  
 dumu ĝirsu=ak='a      zag=∅      b-i-n-tag-∅  
 son    GN=GEN=LOC side=ABS 3NH-LOC-3H.A-touch.PT-3SG.P  
 . . . he repulsed the citizen of Ĝirsu.'
- (17) Inana and Ebih 33–36  
 ni<sub>2</sub>-bi-ta              na-ma-ra-ab-ak-'a-gin<sub>7</sub>  
 nibi=ta              nu-mu-b-ta-b-ak-∅-gin  
 themselves=ABL NEG-VEN-3NH-ABL-3NH.A-do.PT-3SG.P-SUB-EQ  
 'Since they did not act appropriately on their own initiative, . . .  
 giri<sub>17</sub>-bi              ki-še<sub>3</sub>  
 giri=bi=∅              ki=še  
 nose=POSS.3NH=ABS place=TERM

na-ma-ra-ab-te-a-gin<sub>7</sub>  
 nu-mu-r-a-b-te-ø-‘a-gin  
 NEG-VEN-IH-DAT-3NH.A-approach.PT-3SG.P-SUB-EQ

... since they did not put their noses to the ground for me, ...

nundum sahar-ra na-ma-ni-ib-ur<sub>3</sub>-ra-gin<sub>7</sub>  
 nundum=ø sahar=‘a nu-mu-ni-b-ur-ø-‘a-gin  
 lip=ABS earth=LOC NEG-VEN-LOC-3NH.A-drag.PT-3SG.P-SUB-EQ

... since they did not rub their lips in the dust for me, ...

hur-saĝ zig<sub>3</sub> šu-ĝu<sub>10</sub>  
 hursaĝ zig=ø šu=ĝu=e  
 mountain soaring=ABS hand=POSS.IH=LOC

ga-am<sub>3</sub>-mi-ib-si  
 ga-mu-b-i-b-si-ø  
 MOD-VEN-3NH-LOC-3NH.P-fill.PT-(I)SG.A

... I shall fill my hand with the soaring mountain range. ...

ni<sub>2</sub>-ĝu<sub>10</sub> ga-mi-ib-zu  
 ni=ĝu=ø ga-mu-b-zu-ø  
 fear=POSS.IH=ABS MOD-VEN-3NH.P-know.PT-(I)SG.A

... and let them learn fear of me.’

Such a development from comparative to temporal and causal uses is cross-linguistically common: this is exemplified by the English *as*, the German *als*, the French *comme*, or the Akkadian *kīma* (Deutscher 2000: 39). Though the supposed path of change is comparative > temporal > causal, it cannot be supported by evidence from Sumerian, since the examples for all uses date back to the Old Babylonian period. For that reason, the possibility of Akkadian influence cannot be precluded either.

## 6 ABOUT THE PREDICATIVE FUNCTION OF THE SUMERIAN EQUATIVE

There is an overlap between the usage of the equative case and the copula that should also be mentioned here. The two morphemes seem to be exchangeable, especially in literary texts: on different manuscripts, the two morphemes can alternate (Heimpel 1968: 35–36; Black 1998: 16). This has led to an interpretation which tries to associate the use of the equative case with similes and the use of the copula with metaphors (Heimpel 1968: 24).

However, Black (1998: 16) argues that such a sharp difference between the two categories cannot be established.

Case marking, especially with adnominal cases like the Sumerian equative may also fulfill a predicative function (Blake 1994: 94). In Sumerian it is rarely attested but possible for the predicate to be a nominal marked with the equative case, as example (18) indicates.

- (18) Quotation from a letter: TCS I, 346, 5 (Ur III)  
 a-ba      šeš-ĝu<sub>10</sub>-gin<sub>7</sub>  
 aba=∅    šeš=ĝu=gin  
 who=ABS brother=POSS.IH=EQ  
 ‘Who is like my brother?’

This function of the Sumerian equative is rarely encountered, while this is the most important usage of the copula. Such similarities may obscure the difference in the meaning of the two morphemes. Although I do not intend to discuss the meaning of Sumerian copular clauses, it is worth mentioning an example, similar to the one cited above.

- (19) Proverbs: collection 5, 2 [ETCSL 6.1.05] (Old Babylonian)  
 niĝ<sub>2</sub>      ĝe<sub>26</sub>-gin<sub>7</sub>-nam      nu-ĝal<sub>2</sub>  
 niĝ=∅    ĝe=gin=am      nu-ĝal-∅  
 thing=ABS PRON.SG.IH=EQ=COP NEG-be.(located).PT-3SG.S  
 ‘There is nothing like me’

This example suggests that the equative case cannot take over the role of the copula; this is why both morphemes are needed in (19). Because of the relative frequency of constructions like (19) compared to those supporting the predicative use of the equative, it is also possible that the latter could be explained by the orthography, or, as the example comes from a letter, as a feature of spoken language.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to uncover the uses and contexts of the Sumerian equative case. The case marker is usually handled as an Akkadian loan, however, this judgement is usually based on its shared phonological features with the corresponding Akkadian preposition. The arguments examined here were based on those characteristics of the Sumerian equative which are unpredictable on the basis of our current knowledge of Sumerian, and which demonstrate some connection to Akkadian. This recognition further strengthens the strong influence of Sumerian on Akkadian. As another

possibility it was suggested that the unique structure of the noun phrase containing the Sumerian equative morpheme reflects its function as a sentence adverbial. Though this hypothesis cannot be confirmed or refuted according to our present knowledge of Sumerian syntax, the available data corroborate this idea. In addition, it has been shown that the different uses of the equative could be arranged according to their degree of grammaticalization, from a case marker to an adverbializer of subordinate clauses.

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