Language, Writing, and Ideologies in Contact: Sumerian and Akkadian in the Early Second Millennium BCE

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1 Introduction

Sumerian and Akkadian textual bilingualism represents the earliest documented case of language contact. The present contribution examines variations in writing practices resulting from language ideologies and attitudes in the early second millennium BCE. In this study, I identify prevailing language ideologies associated with the use of Sumerian and Akkadian, the two most prominent languages in the Mesopotamian linguistic area. I argue that, despite the disappearance of Sumerian from the vernacular, metalinguistic ideologies valorizing Sumerian expressed primarily in literature correspond with language use in context. These ideologies are represented in writing variations used in various social contexts and textual genres including, as I show here, legal contracts. This brief contribution represents a preliminary investigation into the sociolinguistic parameters of Mesopotamian societal multilingualism reflected in writing practices.

This initial introduction presents the methodologies informing the study. I first discuss the linguistic situation in Mesopotamia at the beginning of the second millennium BCE. I then present relevant native metalinguistic data. Next I compare the metalinguistic ideologies with language use “in action” by examining writing variations in the phrase **mu—pad** (Sum.) corresponding to **nūš—itma** (Akk.) ‘(s)he swore an oath’¹ as used in legal real estate documents

¹ Sumerian words are indicated in bold-faced font and glossed immediately afterwards (e.g., **mu** ‘name’); words and their morphophonemics are connected with hyphens (-), which separate the individual signs. Akkadian words are given in linguistically normalized form (as opposed to transliterated form wherein individual signs are represented) and indicated in bold-faced, italicized font and glossed immediately afterwards (e.g., *šumu* ‘name’). Em-dashes (—) separate parts of idiomatic phrases. Where relevant, I provide linguistic analysis of morphology. The following abbreviations are used: 3 = 3rd person; ABS = Absolutive; ACC = Accusative; Akk. = Akkadian; CONJ = Conjunction; DN = Divine Name; ERG = Ergative; IMPF = Imperfective; NTRL = neutral (focus); NOM = Nominative; PN = Personal Name; RN = Royal Name; SG = Singular; SN = Settlement Name; Sum. = Sumerian.

from the city of Sippar, a genre removed from the social context that produced much of the metalinguistic data.

1.1 Languages in Contact

Several studies have analyzed the effects of language contact on the linguistic structures of Sumerian and Akkadian, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and the lexicon.² The majority of these language contact studies examine how language structures change as a result of contact. My analysis follows Y. Matras (2009, 2010) in taking a functional approach to language contact, based on the assumption that multilingual speakers (or writers) “have a complex repertoire of linguistic structures at their disposal” that does not conform to rigid language systems. Such language users select contextually appropriate structures, including levels of mixing, according to habitually ingrained practices of language socialization (Matras 2009: 4). The present contribution focuses on variation in a multilingual society rather than on structural changes resulting from contact.

This study takes writing practices as the focus of investigation. Very few studies on language contact recognize the importance and complications of the written medium, focusing instead on the effects of language contact on speech practices.³ The effects of Sumerian-Akkadian contact are often obfuscated by the writing system, most notably via alloglottography (see especially Rubio 2006b). Both Sumerian and Akkadian are written in cuneiform, a polyvalent

² Studies on the structural effects of contact on Akkadian and Sumerian include Oberhuber (1981), Haayer (1986), Pedersén (1989), Karahashi (2008) and Zólyomi (2011). Loanwords and lexical borrowing between the two languages has been the object of considerable study. D. O. Edzard (2003, 178) estimates that 7% of Akkadian vocabulary are Sumerian loans. As P. Michalowski notes, such a small percentage does not indicate mass lexical interference (Michalowski 2006: 169). The opposite phenomenon, Semitic/Akkadian loans in Sumerian, has received extended attention in recent years (see Krebernik 1998: 265; Sommerfeld 2006; Civil 2007). These studies, especially Civil (2007), demonstrate the pervasive extent of contact. One suspects that careful attention would demonstrate further Semitic loans in Sumerian that have undergone alterations and are therefore less easily recognized. For example, Sumerian **mud** ‘blood’ may be a loan from Akkadian **dāmu**—‘blood’, with phonological metathesis. Moreover, some Semitic loans are represented in Sumerian as a noun—verb lexically compounded phrase, such as Sumerian **šu—ḥu-uz** ‘to burn’ from Akkadian **šūhuzu** ‘to flare up’ or Sumerian **saṇ—rig** ‘to give’ from Akkadian **šarāku** ‘to give’ (on such loans, see provisionally Karahashi 2000; Edzard 2003: 175–76; Karahashi 2004).

³ On the issue of the written medium as object of historical linguistic study, see further Romaine (1982: 14–21) and, more recently, Coulmas (2013).

and polysemic writing system.⁴ Sumerian, however, tends to use signs to represent individual words; Akkadian tends to write words syllabically. As a result of contact, Akkadian words may be represented by the sign used for a semantically or phonologically corresponding Sumerian word. Thus, the sign MU (𒍪) may be used to write Sumerian *mu* 'name' as well as the semantically corresponding Akkadian *šumu* 'name'. This micro-alloglottography is common in almost all Akkadian texts, beginning in the latter half of the third millennium. Some texts extend alloglottography over entire clauses or even a whole text.

In a recent contribution on contact languages, L. Johanson examines "ways of writing in which the genre requires some kind of intertwining" (Johanson 2013: 273). Johanson categorizes Sumerian and Akkadian alloglottography as his Type E, which he describes as "Elements of a higher-ranking code are used in texts to represent a lower-ranking code" (Johanson 2013: 274). That is, the higher code graphically represents the lower code, which is read aloud. As Johanson notes, "This technique manifests a loyalty to a high-ranking code and its script regardless of the acts of reading. . . . The higher-ranking codes used for writing . . . offer cultivated formal ways of expression" (Johanson 2013: 314). In Johanson's rankings, Type E reflects the category in which the lower-ranking code demonstrates highest degree of passivity. That is, the higher-ranking code is expressed representing the lower-ranking code; the lower-ranking code is completely obscured. Johanson's discussion provides a typological background under which to organize and analyze the written expressions of Sumerian and Akkadian contact.

1.2 *Language Ideologies*

P. Kroskrity discussed language ideologies in a recent overview as follows:

[B]eliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states. These conceptions, whether explicitly articulated or embodied in communicative practice, represent incomplete, or 'partly successful', attempts to rationalize language usage; such rationalizations are typically multiple, context-bound, and necessarily constructed from the sociocultural experience of the speaker. (Kroskrity 2010: 192)

4 For brief introductions to the cuneiform writing system, see Michalowski, Cooper, and Gragg (1996), Woods (2010), or Finkel and Taylor (2015).

Kroskrity's characterization provides a working definition of this analytical tool.⁵ Moreover, language attitudes are significant social predictors in contact-induced change (Thomason 2001: 77–85). As I show in this study, such ideologies are embedded in metadiscourse and usage practices most apparently with reference to Sumerian. Ideologies for Akkadian are evident in regular use, especially in contrast with the use of Sumerian.

2 *Linguistic Context*

The Mesopotamian linguistic area had a long tradition of multilingualism (Vanstiphout 1999). As early as the first half of the third millennium BCE, textual evidence indicates that Semitic and Sumerian language communities coexisted in roughly the same geographic location. At the site of Tell Abū Šalābīl (approximately 130 km SE of Baghdad), texts were composed in Sumerian by scribes with linguistically Semitic names (Biggs 1967). Sumerian-Semitic language contact almost certainly predates the inscribed texts from the third millennium. M. Civil (2007), in particular, shows that Sumerian borrowed from Semitic early in its history, arguing that the number of Semitic loans into Sumerian is "significant and consonant with the coexistence of Sumerian- and Semitic-speaking populations that must have taken place from the dawn of history" (Civil 2007: 17), echoing earlier observations by J. Cooper (1973: 239–40). Moreover, early multilingualism, despite the trends in the textual record, cannot be restricted to bilingualism. As G. Rubio notes, "The picture of the linguistic situation of Mesopotamia of early periods should be that of fluidity, of words traveling together with the objects and techniques they designate, of different languages and their dialects (most of which have left no traces or just a few . . . in surviving language), all of them sharing the same space and perhaps even sometimes the same speakers" (Rubio 1999: 11).

Sumerian, an isolate, is the first attested language in the region. In the latter half of the third millennium, Akkadian emerged in administrative writing as the language of a new dynasty.⁶ The Akkadian languages, including both

5 For discussion of approaches to language ideologies and attitudes in historical linguistics, see Milroy (2012) with literature.

6 Assyriologists are often lax in their descriptions of this language group. It is collectively known in the literature as Akkadian, but there are numerous variations (dialectal? geographic?). The most prominent are what are known as Babylonian, the dialect (for lack of a better term) generally used in the southern part of Mesopotamia beginning in the late third millennium, and Assyrian, the dialect generally used in the northern part of Mesopotamia.

Assyrian and Babylonian forms, constitute a branch of the Semitic family. Sometime in the last centuries of the third millennium, Sumerian likely died out as a vernacular (Cooper 1973; Michalowski 2006; Rubio 2006a), yet continued to be written in certain social contexts.⁷

Multiple languages were in use in southern Mesopotamia during the early second millennium BCE, the period known as the Old Babylonian period (henceforth OB). Four are attested in writing: Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurrian, and Elamite. Another, Amorite, is attested primarily in personal names, but not in contextual usage. Other languages beyond these five were almost certainly used in society, but have not been preserved in writing and only sporadically in personal names.

During the OB period, the true extent of multilingualism is obfuscated by the shifting statuses of languages. Three different languages clearly operated in various levels of society. Akkadian was presumably the predominantly spoken language, largely used to record personal letters, administrative and legal texts in addition to some literary works, mathematical practice texts, and divinatory treatises. Sumerian, though no longer a widely spoken vernacular—if spoken at all—rose to prominence as a literary and cultural language. Sumerian was confined to education, magical incantations, liturgy, and specific administrative documents. Amorite, a West Semitic language (as opposed to the East Semitic branch to which Akkadian belongs) was the ancestral language of the ruling family in Babylon; however, no textual material has been preserved. Some form of Amorite was apparently spoken by non-sedentary populations in the Mari region, along the bend of the Euphrates. It is not clear how much Amorite was used in urban areas in southern Mesopotamia. The exact character of the contact relationship among these three languages is difficult to quantify. Amorite and Akkadian are typologically similar (both fall within the

Despite problems with the nomenclature, I adopt the terminology of the field in the present study.

⁷ The death of Sumerian as a vernacular is a contentious topic in Assyriology. Until the late 1990s, the clear majority position was that Sumerian was dead or dying in the last century of the third millennium. Contrary opinions have arisen that at least challenge that consensus (Sallaberger 2004; Edzard 2005; Woods 2006), bringing the death of Sumerian as a spoken language into the first few centuries of the second millennium. Woods' (2006) suggestion that Sumerian was spoken in some parts, albeit not widely, as late as the eighteenth century cannot be dismissed out of hand. The extant data, however, does not deal with any possible outliers.

Semitic language family), whereas Sumerian differs drastically from either.⁸ Elamite and Hurrian, unrelated to the previous three, appear in incantations and personal names.⁹ Other languages almost certainly could have been heard on some streets and social situations. The multilingual character of the OB period thus presents a case for the analysis of ideology and differentiation (Gal and Irvine 1995; Irvine and Gal 2000), but the textual record preserves only the ideological distinction between Akkadian and Sumerian.

3 Metalinguistic Data and Language Ideology

In this section, I discuss the metalinguistic data from the OB period, which indicates the social position of Amorite, Akkadian, and Sumerian. I show that, at least for the scribal elite, Sumerian was viewed as a language of culture and education.

3.1 Amorite

Little is known about Amorite linguistically (Durand 2012). A recent publication (Ziegler and Charpin 2007) elucidates some prevailing linguistic attitudes about the language. Shamshi-Addu, the ruler of the northern Mesopotamian kingdom Ekallātum, in a letter written in Akkadian to his son, Yasmakh-Addu, ruler of the city Mari to the west of the Mesopotamian heartland, berates his son for asking for someone to presumably teach him Sumerian, instead of learning the more practical language, Amorite: 'Regarding (the request) you sent me to send you one man who (can) read Sumerian, why do you want a man who (can) read Sumerian? Learn to speak Amorite!' (M.7930+M.8157).

⁸ Since little is known about Amorite, my attention focuses primarily on the difference between Akkadian and Sumerian including the following generalities: Sumerian is considered a split-ERGATIVE language, whereas Akkadian is a NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE language; Sumerian is agglutinative, Akkadian is inflectional; Akkadian nominals are marked with cases; Akkadian utilizes prepositions, Sumerian uses post-positions marked on noun phrases; both languages differ in phonemic inventory, with Sumerian's less understood and the differences complicated by the shared writing system. Some, such as J. Høyrup (1992), have argued for Sumerian as a mixed language, but such discussions have not been widely accepted. For brief introductions to grammar, see Huehnergard and Woods (2004) for Akkadian and Michalowski (2004) for Sumerian.

⁹ For grammatical introductions, see Khačikjan (1998) or Stolper (2004) for Elamite and Wilhelm (2004) for Hurrian.

In another letter, this time from Yasmakh-Addu to Shamshi-Addu, Yasmakh-Addu addresses his father's complaint: 'The tablet of my lord arrived here saying . . . "You are incapable of speaking Amorite with them (the nomads)!" . . . Without exaggeration, I will learn to speak Amorite!' (A.3823). From these two letters, we see the ideological contrast between the three languages. Yasmakh-Addu, an Akkadian speaker, wishes to learn Sumerian, but should be learning Amorite. Moreover, from Shamshi-Addu's viewpoint, Amorite would be more useful to Yasmakh-Addu in governing his kingdom. We see then a continuum of Amorite, the language of Yasmakh-Addu's subjects, to Akkadian, the language of correspondence for the two rulers, to Sumerian, a specialists' language with enough esteem that Yasmakh-Addu wanted to learn it.¹⁰

3.2 Sumerian

Most metalinguistic data from this period concerns Sumerian. All of it emerges from a particular social field—scribal education. N. Veldhuis has described scribal education as a process wherein students, children of elite members of society, were enculturated into an imagined Sumerian cultural heritage (Veldhuis 2004). Scribal education was not merely training in literacy, but the routinization of habits focused on the Sumerian language—a language no longer useful in everyday practices—and the development of a bureaucratic "fraternity" (Michalowski 1987; 2012), an interpretive community shaped by shared experiences and knowledge. In short, scribal education laid the ideological ground for a Sumerian identity formation that indexed power, scholarly literacy, and tradition. It comes as no surprise, then, that the metalanguage derived from the literature of scribal education (and written almost exclusively in Sumerian) extols Sumerian as the premier language and reflexively emphasizes the necessity of Sumerian for belonging to the scribal community.

The preeminence of Sumerian over all other languages is presented in a small section in the narrative *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*. In this story, Enmerkar, the king of Uruk (the prototypical Sumerian city) challenges the ruler of Aratta, a mythical Shangri-la representing the wealth and splendor of the eastern lands. The point of the story is Uruk's superiority over Aratta. In a much discussed, although relatively small section, the story implicitly aggrandizes the Sumerian language.

¹⁰ Very little metalinguistic data exists for Akkadian in this period, except in contrast to the other languages.

At that time, there was no snake, there was no scorpion, there was no hyena, there was no lion, there was no dog or wolf, there was no fear or trembling—man had no rival.

At that time, the lands of Shubur and Hamazi, the distinctly tongued; Sumer, the great mountain, the essence of nobility; Akkad, the land possessing the befitting, and the land of Martu (the Amorite land), lying in safety—the totality of heaven and earth, the well-guarded people, indeed they proclaimed (the great god) Enlil in a single language.

At that time, the contest lord, the contest prince, the contest king, (the god) Enki, the contest lord, the contest prince, the contest king, the contest lord, the contest prince, the contest king, Enki, the lord of abundance and true word, the lord of wisdom who watches over the land, the expert of all the gods, the chosen of wisdom, the lord of Eridu, (Enki) set up the complete and total alteration of the language in their mouths. The speech of humanity is one. (ELA 136–55)¹¹

According to the story, the god Enki made all people temporarily speak one language in order to facilitate the contest between the two rulers.¹² Since the narrative is written in Sumerian and because the point of the story is the superiority of Uruk—representative of all Sumer—that one language is presumably Sumerian. Thus, Sumerian is foremost over all the languages of the region, including Akkadian and Amorite.

Other metalinguistic examples explicitly regard Sumerian as a requisite for true scholarship. Sumerian proverbs (SP) not only taught scribes Sumerian grammar (Veldhuis 2000), but also provided an opportunity to reinforce ideology and particular social perspectives.¹³

¹¹ The most recent edition of this story is Mittermayer (2009). See also the *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* 1.8.2.3 (etcs1.orinst.ox.ac.uk/) and Vanstiphout (2003). The translation here is my own.

¹² The interpretation of this passage has been much debated in Assyriological literature. The interpretation presented here is detailed in Crisostomo (forthcoming). The two most prominent explanations are polar opposites: either Enki, in the past, divided all the languages (and thus a parallel to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel) or he, in the future, will make all people speak one language. No matter the interpretation, the mythical association of Mesopotamia with multilingualism stands and Sumerian emerges as the most prominent of those languages. For discussion, see Mittermayer (2009) and Keetman (2010) with previous literature.

¹³ See also Alster and Oshima (2006). Editions of the SP may be found in Alster (1997) and the *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* 6.1.02.

A scribe who does not know Sumerian, what (kind of) scribe is he?
(SP 2.47)

A scribe who does not know Sumerian, how will he get a translation?
(SP 2.49)

In a group of satirical literary texts known as the Eduba texts (Eduba is the Sumerian word for school) which purportedly depict life in the school, Sumerian language ideology permeates the narratives and, consequently, the practices of the scribes depicted in the stories (and those copying the texts). This group of texts, although not indicative of reality, nevertheless articulate the ideology of the school (Volk 1996) and the principle subject in the school, Sumerian.¹⁴

Do you speak Sumerian as well as I do? (D3: 66)

(Supervisor): Young man, are you a student?

(Student): I am a student.

(Supervisor): If you are a student, do you know Sumerian?

(Student): I can speak (OR: translate?) Sumerian

(Supervisor): You are young; how do you speak it (so well)?

(Student): I have listened carefully to my teacher's instructions

(EdD: 1–6)¹⁵

(Student): I know all my scribal arts; I am not restricted by anything; my teacher shows me one wedge (and) I can add one or two from memory. I have sat (in school) for the complete duration (so) I *wrestle with* Sumerian, the scribal arts, interpretation, and accounts. I speak (OR: translate?) Sumerian. (EdD: 32–38)

In the second and third examples above, both from the composition Eduba D, the two participants engage in a series of boasts about their competence in scholarly activities. Here, and similarly in the first example, ability in Sumerian

¹⁴ Some of the compositions cited still await publication in critical editions. Lines cited may be found primarily in Sjöberg (1976) or Volk (1996). Exceptions are noted. This category of Eduba texts comprises Eduba A (EdA): *Schooldays*; Eduba B (EdB): *The young scribe and his father*; Eduba C (EdC): *A supervisor's advice to a young scribe*; Eduba D (EdD): *Scribal activities*; Eduba R (EdR): *Eduba regulations*; Dialogue 1 (D1): *Dialogue between two scribes*; Dialogue 2 (D2): *Dialogue between Enkihegal and Enkitalu*; Dialogue 3 (D3): *Dialogue between Enkimansum and Girinīsag*.

¹⁵ For an edition of the first seventy-one lines of this composition, see Civil (1985).

is the first issue addressed, indicating its basic importance to the scribal arts. Excellent knowledge of Sumerian represented the basic prerequisite for being a scribe.

Similar compositions depict the two interlocutors debating each others' merits as a scribe. One of the basic insults is to question one's capacity to understand Sumerian.

(Student): I speak (OR: translate?) Sumerian

(Supervisor): Indeed, yet Sumerian is obscure to you! (EdD: 38–39)

Your tongue does not produce Sumerian correctly! (D1: 56)

He is "heavy" for Sumerian; His tongue does not move correctly (D2: 97)

(He is) deaf about the scribal arts, deaf about Sumerian (D3: 10)

Direct opposition between Sumerian and Akkadian is provided in the composition Eduba A. This satirical composition traces a student's day in school, during which he is constantly accused of doing something incorrectly by the staff/faculty and punished. Among these offenses:

The one (in charge of) Sumerian (said): "He spoke Akkadian!" Then he caned me. (EdA: 40)

The teacher admonishes the student for speaking Akkadian, implying that doing so in school was improper and needed correction (see Kroskrity 1998: 107–9).

Similarly, from a literary letter also composed within the field of scribal education:

Do not neglect Sumerian! Once more, I am responding to you in correct language. (Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany 22: 3–4)¹⁶

Here, the letter writer seems to imply that a previous correspondence from the addressee was written in a language other than Sumerian. The writer corrects the addressee and composes his letter properly in Sumerian.

¹⁶ This humorous, artificial letter concerns students attempting to fool the teacher into letting them leave school with falsified parental notes (see Kleiner 2011: 181–84). M. Civil (2000: 108–09) interprets 'correct language' (*eme si-sa₂*) here as grammatically correct, rather than ethically or socially correct.

3.3 Conclusions from the Metalinguistic Data

Many other references could be brought forward as evidence, but the data from *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, Sumerian Proverbs, and the set of Eduba texts provide typical examples of metadiscourse on the ideology of Sumerian. In the corpus of Sumerian literature which existed in the social life of scribal education, competence in Sumerian served as the most basic aptitude required for admission into the scribal community. As such, the metalinguistic data portray Sumerian as distinct among languages. Moreover, the use of any language other than Sumerian in school was deemed inappropriate.

The limits of metalinguistic discourses are well-established (see Silverstein 1981; Lucy 1993; Silverstein 1993, 1998).¹⁷ The metadiscourses presented here, particularly those focused on Sumerian, offer idealistic portrayals stemming from a social field attempting to reflexively define its uniqueness and viability. The ideologies represented with such bias should be regarded as belonging strictly to the field of scribal education. Any assertion that such ideologies which posture Sumerian as the preeminent language represent language ideology in the broader multilingual society should be regarded with skepticism. Such metadiscourse represents only one aspect in our attempt to analyze (and reconstruct) language ideology.

The application of sociolinguistic hierarchical values of prestige or higher versus lower codes does not always apply during the OB, nor are the values consistent among all discourse genres. Personal letters and divinatory compendia, for example, are written exclusively in Akkadian implying that Akkadian was appropriate linguistic code for those genres. The metalinguistic data from scribal education, however, explicates Sumerian as a higher ranked language due to its association with traditional scribal culture. The following section tests whether the cultural prestige of Sumerian may be detected beyond the realms of a single social field.

4 Language in Use

The native metalinguistic data present a picture that glorifies Sumerian—which by the time of the OB period was no longer productive—over the languages of everyday use, most notably Akkadian. In this section, I contrast

¹⁷ Following Silverstein's (1998) distinctions, I have provided a group-level representation of metadiscourse—ideologies intended to differentiate social groups—and an example of nomic calibration in the mythical example above, a rationalized basis for the language ideology.

tokens of language use in texts with the ideological picture given in literary texts produced by a social field which had reason to reinforce the importance of Sumerian. I consider a genre removed from the world of scribal education, legal documents, focusing on variation in the phrase (Sum.) *mu—pad* = (Akk.) *nīš—itma* '(s)he swore an oath'. I also provide a few examples of changes in language structure represented in or resulting from the phrase under examination. In this analysis, I show that socially-conditioned "ways of speaking" documented in language use in context reinforces literary ideological portrayals of Sumerian.

4.1 Writing Variation in Oath Taking

Apart from letters and administrative documents, legal contracts provide the closest available data for accessing regular social life. In contracts, a principle ratified certain stipulations by taking an oath, swearing on the king, city, and/or gods. In Sumerian, this oath was formulated via the base phrase *mu—pad* 'to name the name' (literally):

mu	^d utu	^d marduk	hammurapi	u	irīsippar ^{ki}
mu	utu	marduk	hammurapi	u	sippar.(ak).Ø
name	DN	DN	RN	CONJ	SN.GEN.ABS

in-pad₃
i.n.pad.Ø
 NTRL.ERG.swear[-IMPF].ABS

'He swore on the gods Utu (and) Marduk, king Hammurapi, and the city Sippar.'

The corresponding Akkadian phrase was *nīš—itma* 'swear on the life' (lit.):

<i>nīš</i>	^d utu	^d marduk	hammurapi	u	irīsippar ^{ki}
life	DN	DN	RN	CONJ	SN.GEN.ACC

itma
 swear[3;SG, -IMPF]

'He swore on the gods Utu (and) Marduk, king Hammurapi, and the city Sippar.'

In this period, a type of orthographic code-switching can occur:

mu	^d utu	^d marduk	hammurapi	u	irīsippar ^{ki}	<i>itma</i>
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'He swore on the gods Utu (and) Marduk, king Hammurapi, and the city Sippar.'

Moreover, by analogy with Akkadian, which had a suffixed plural morpheme on the verb, and a misunderstanding (or, perhaps, adaptation) of the Sumerian plural copula *me.eš*, the phrase with plural actors could be rendered in a morphologically variant contrived Sumerian form in equal distribution with the regular plural form:¹⁸

mu	^d utu	^d marduk	hammurapi	u	iri ^{ki} sippar
mu	utu	marduk	hammurapi	u	sippar.(ak).Ø
name	DN	DN	RN	CONJ	SN.GEN.ABS

in-pad₃-de₃-meš

i.n.pad.e.meš

NTRL.ERG.swear[-IMPF].PL

'They swore on the gods Utu (and) Marduk, king Hammurapi, and the city Sippar.'

For this study, I surveyed 844 real estate documents from the city of Sippar (30 km SW of Baghdad) from ca. 1900–1600 published by L. Dekiere (1994). Dekiere published a corpus of texts now located in the British Museum and is, thus, a representative sample. I follow Dekiere in separating the texts into four distinct chronological groups: Pre-Hammurapi (Pre-Ha; ca. 1900–1792), Hammurapi (Ha; 1791–1750), Samsu-iluna (Si; 1749–1712), and Post-Samsu-iluna (Post-Si; 1711–1595). I counted as evidence only those instances in which both parts of the verbal phrase are clearly present and obvious as to their form. That is, I omitted any examples that, due to damage to the material object, required reconstruction of either part of the phrase. Moreover, I counted envelopes

¹⁸ Literary Sumerian and Sumerian contracts from earlier periods would render the verb:

in-pad₃-de₃-eš

i.n.pad.eš

Here the combination of pre-verbal affix [n] plus the post-verbal affix [eš] indicates the plural AGENT. The Sumerian form *me.eš* is the verb 'to be' with a plural AGENT marker. Beginning in the early second millennium, the form *meš* is used, mostly in Akkadian contexts (especially when using Sumerian glyphs to represent Akkadian words), to indicate plurality. Early and literary Sumerian typically did not mark plurality or, if marked, plurality would be indicated by reduplication (*dinir dinir* 'gods') or a suffixed morpheme for animates [*ene*] (*dinir.ene* 'gods'). Speakers of Akkadian, which marked plurality inflectionally within its morphology, were apparently dissatisfied with the lack of a plural marker for certain noun classes, e.g., cities, and began using the plural form of the copular verb as a plural marker (*iri.meš* 'cities') and eventually extended its use to all noun classes (*dinir.meš* 'gods') and, as in the above examples, some conventional verbal expressions.

as separate attestations.¹⁹ Even though the envelopes routinely duplicated the tablet, there were at least a dozen examples of alternations in this phrase between tablet and envelope. I further sub-divided the texts into genres such as sales, litigation, inheritance, and adoption; these categorizations were not immediately productive. I found 234 admissible tokens of the oath clause. The texts are unevenly distributed diachronically. Moreover, the sample is too small from which to draw statistically reliable conclusions, but the trends represented are nevertheless suggestive. Based on a brief survey of further textual data from the site, further study is likely to present similar data.²⁰ Other cities offer different writing practices, but only the Sippar material allows for the diachronic analysis adopted here.

The corpus of investigation presents several difficulties for linguistic analysis. One issue is the language under examination in a given text and the linguistic phenomena in operation. During the OB period, there is evidence that contracts seemingly written in Sumerian represent alloglottography and were read in Akkadian (Schorr 1909). Differences between some tablets and their envelopes—which ostensibly provide the same data—further confirm this understanding. For example, one tablet reads:

mu ^dutu mu ^dmarduk *zabium* u iri^{ki}sippar *teš₂-bi* in-pad₃-de₃-eš

They altogether swore on the name of Utu, the name of Marduk, king Zabium and Sippar

The envelope to this document reads:

mu ^dutu ^dmarduk *zabium* u iri^{ki}sippar *itmû*

They swore on the name of Utu, Marduk, king Zabium, and Sippar

Where the tablet writes the verb in Sumerian, the envelope writes the Akkadian equivalent. The choice to present stock phrases orthographically as Sumerian implies a stylistic variation, which may be attributed to an

¹⁹ Some documents were covered with a thin layer of clay on which the content of the internal document was duplicated, summarized, or excerpted. Envelopes served as a means of both legal and physical security. For further on envelopes, see Taylor (2011: 19–21).

²⁰ For example, in the corpus examined in the sixth volume of Dekiere (1994), a slightly different corpus not included in my principal analysis, the percentages of variations follow. Pre-Ha (n = 1): variant (5) = 100%; Ha (n = 8): (3) = 37.5%, (1) = 37.5%, (4) = 25%; Si (n = 18): (3) = 27.8%, (4) = 72.2%; Post-Si (n = 8): (1) = 12.5%, (3) = 12.5%, (4) = 75%. See below for typologies of variations and analysis of the primary corpus.

ideological stance. The practice of representing language in Sumerian further affirms the higher ranked cultural status of Sumerian during the OB, explicated in the literary texts attributed to the field of scribal education. In Johanson's typology discussed above, Sumerian as the higher ranked linguistic code is contrasted with Akkadian, which is not overtly conveyed. The writing practices and the variations in representation further illuminate ideological expression. At issue, then, is not language or supposed speech practice, but rather writing practice.

Given the above information, one can conceive six basic variations of the oath clause: (1) *mu—pad*. (2) *nīš—itma*. (3) *mu—itma*. (4) *mu—i.n.pad.e.meš*. (5) *nīš—pad*. (6) *nīš—i.n.pad.e.meš*.²¹ Of these possible variations, however, (5) and (6) were not found at all in this corpus. Additionally, variation (2), the unilingual Akkadian formation of the formula, is only found Pre-Ha. In fact, Pre-Ha shows the most variation of orthographies and conjugations.²² The final three periods show a movement towards variations (3) and (4), as shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4 Variations in the oath formula.²³

21 One regular variation is *mu—Ø* where the verbal element is elided. I did not admit this variation in my data. Another possible variation, the “native” Akkadian phrase *Ø—itma*, the verb as intransitive, is never used among the documents surveyed.

22 For example, the standard formula is aspectually PERFECTIVE. In Pre-Ha, some Sumerian versions of the formula are IMPERFECTIVE:

i.n.pad.e.Ø

NTRL.ACC.Swear.IMPF.NOM[3;SG]

One other variant in Pre-Ha is the nominalized form *i.n.pad.a*.

23 Alternative variations are omitted from the percentages in the chart. Only Pre-Ha used variations deviating from the norm, discussed in the preceding note.

The greater degree of variation in Pre-Ha indicates that the formula was more flexible and not yet standardized. As time progresses, variant (1) is absorbed into variant (4), regardless of the number of actors. As shown in Figure 4, variants (3) and (4) are the preferred instantiations of the formula, especially towards the end of the period investigated. Variant (2) disappears entirely after Pre-Ha. Moreover, no forms with *nīš* are used after Pre-Ha. As mentioned earlier, neither variations (5) or (6) are found; that is, there are no combinations of Akkadian *nīš* with Sumerian *pad*.²⁴ At this time, given the scope of this study, I cannot determine the pragmatics of variation nor can I detect patterns for ordered differentiation.²⁵

The data suggest that writers of contracts at Sippar preferred more “Sumerian-ized” versions, particularly later in the OB. Thus, even in a genre far removed from the Sumerian-centric field of scribal education, orthographic conventions promote an ideology of Sumerian as an eminent cultural language.

4.2 Structural Changes

The oath clause variations discussed above also indicate changes in linguistic structure. I briefly survey three such changes, including morphological, lexical, and graphic changes resulting from the contact of Sumerian and Akkadian.

The form *i.n.pad.e.meš* (written *in-pad₃-de₃-meš*; see footnote 18) represents either a morphological change reflected in writing resulting from a non-native misunderstanding or adaptation (see Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Thomason 2001: 66–76) of the Sumerian form *me.eš*—a form of the plural copula or verb ‘to be’ plus plural agent morpheme—or, less likely, a historical grammaticalization in written Sumerian. The writing *i.n.pad.e.meš* does not occur in Sumerian literary texts produced during the OB period nor in any genres from earlier periods. In such documents, the typical verbal form expressing a plural agent is written *i.n.pad.eš*. Beginning in the OB period, *meš* is regularly used to graphically mark plurality when a logogram is used to express an Akkadian word. Post OB, *meš* is also extended to mark plurality in Sumerian contexts. Although most often used on nouns, *meš* may also be used on verbs, as in the case of the oath phrase. As shown above, *meš* in the oath phrase is applied to all forms of the verb, regardless of the actual number

24 The formula *zi—pad* ‘to call on the life’ (literally), a more precise Sumerian equivalent of Akkadian *nīš—itma*, is used in the OB, but was not found in the corpus under investigation. Conversely, I find no instances of *šum—itma* ‘to swear on the name’, the more precise Akkadian equivalent to Sumerian *mu—pad*.

25 Not enough data exists to determine variation along traditional sociolinguistic markers such as sex or gender, age, or class.

of agents. That is, the form *i.n.pad.e.meš* occurs with both singular and plural agents.

The use of *meš* in legal expressions seems to have been taught in schools. The Sippar Legal Phrasebook, a list of business expressions which student scribes copied as part of their education, gives verbal forms such as *in-kur₂-e-me-eš* 'they will deny', using *meš* to mark plurality.²⁶ Literary Sumerian during the OB period would have written *in-kur₂-re-eš* or similar. The use of *meš* in a text from scribal education thus corresponds to the use of *meš* in legal contracts.²⁷

The stock phrase *nīš—itma* 'he swore on the life' in these contracts is a pseudo-calque on the Sumerian phrase *mu—pad*. The Akkadian verb *tamû* semantically entails an act of oath-taking and does not require an object upon which to swear an oath. The influence of Sumerian *mu—pad*, an idiomatic phrase which typically requires both components, dictated that the equivalent Akkadian phrase also be represented with both a nominal and verbal element. Thus, in legal contracts, the full phrase *nīš—itma* is utilized, even if one or both parts is represented as the corresponding Sumerian *mu—pad*.

As a result of the calque, the sign form MU (𒍪) —which signifies Sumerian *mu* 'name' and, in the oath phrase, Akkadian *nīšu* 'life'—adopts further significs in post-OB texts. For example, a mid-first millennium prayer uses the esoteric writing: *ina... MU ŠU-MU* to represent Akkadian *ina... nīš qātiya* 'in... the raising of my hands (i.e., prayer)'. In this phrase, the first iteration of MU represents the Akkadian participle *nīšu* 'raising'. The equivalency MU is *nīšu* 'raising' is based on the homophony of *nīšu* 'raising' and *nīšu* 'life' as found in the oath clause. Thus, the calque of *mu—pad*, brought into Akkadian as *nīš—itma*, allows the sign MU to represent the syllable /nīš/ and is thus adapted to a different word *nīšu* 'raising' and new context. The graphic adaptation is an example of a contact-induced change in the semiotic system.

²⁶ On the legal phrasebooks used in education, see Veldhuis (2014: 188–94). The tablet cited here for the Sippar Legal Phrasebook is HS 1702 (to be published in a forthcoming volume of the *Texte Materialen Hilprecht-Collection*). For a preliminary edition, see the Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts the Sippar Legal Phrasebook (oracc.org/dcclt/Q000260).

²⁷ Similar phrases are found in the localized Nippur Legal Phrasebook (oracc.org/dcclt/Q000045), such as *in-na-an-la₂-me-eš* 'they paid him'. Notably, to my knowledge, neither legal contracts nor model contracts—used in schools to practice writing legal contracts (oracc.org/obmc)—from the city of Nippur use *meš* to mark plurality as discussed above. In other words, grammatical forms taught in the lists in schools at Nippur were not utilized in writing contracts at the same city.

4.3 *Conclusions from Language in Use*

The analysis of real estate contracts from Sippar presented above suggests that writing practices of the oath clause favored Sumerian forms over Akkadian forms. Moreover, the data further imply movement toward increased use of Sumerian forms over time. In addition to variation, the above discussion of the oath clause demonstrates some examples of contact-induced structural change.

5 *Conclusions*

The study of contact between Sumerian and Akkadian presents complex challenges. Among these complexities are the obscurities caused by the writing system and modern imperfect understanding of Sumerian linguistic structure, a problem exacerbated by the Akkadian lens through which we understand Sumerian. Despite such complications, sociolinguistic research on the effects and outcomes of contact on these two languages remains a viable pursuit. The present study has attempted initial research on the topic by demonstrating that linguistic ideologies prominent in literary texts are reflected also in the writing practices used in non-literary texts, particularly legal contracts. The ideology of Sumerian as an esteemed cultural language pervaded society and affected writing practices beyond the social field which produced explicit metadiscourse on the subject. Future analyses of variation may further elucidate and qualify the nature of multilingualism in the Mesopotamian linguistic area and present a clearer picture of the earliest documented case of language contact.

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Inner-Semitic Loans and Lexical Doublets vs. Genetically Related Cognates

Lutz Edzard

1 Introduction

A recent quotation pinpointing the intricate issue of inner-Semitic loans as opposed to mere cognates is the following: "The problem with Semitic loans is to distinguish them from cognates. And in respect of non-Semitic loans, if they cannot be tracked, it is not always possible to determine whether they are Kulturwörter, Wanderwörter, cross-cultural loanwords or even isoglosses" (Watson 2005: 194). The phenomenon of lexical doublets in the service of semantic differentiation or "fine-tuning" may complicate or even put into question traditional genetic subgrouping, at least as long as such subgrouping essentially rests on phonological criteria. In order to approach this subject, I shall first present a brief overview of typical loans, focussing on Akkadian, Hebrew, Arabic, and Amharic examples, loans from non-Semitic source languages as well as other Semitic source languages (i.e., inner-Semitic loans). In a further step, I shall look more closely at the issue of lexical doublets emerging in the process of inner-Semitic borrowing. Finally, I shall briefly consider whether the existence of such doublets can affect traditional models of subgrouping in Semitic.

2 Borrowing in Individual Semitic Languages

2.1 Akkadian

Akkadian draws on a large stock of loaned vocabulary, mostly from Sumerian (see Lieberman 1977), but also other source languages. Here are a few examples:

(1) Loanwords in Akkadian

Akkadian		Source word in the language of origin
<i>dû</i>	'hill'	Sumerian <i>du</i>
<i>ekallu</i>	'palace'	Sumerian <i>é.gal</i> 'big house'
<i>erēqu</i>	'flee'	Aramaic $\sqrt{RQ}$

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