THE SUMERIAN DISCOURSE MARKERS U₄-BA AND U₄-BI-A

C. Jay Crisostomo (University of Michigan)

Abstract

In Old Babylonian Sumerian literature, the temporal phrases u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a typically occur in complementary distribution. Previous analyses have focused on morphological disparity to differentiate the two. The present paper considers pragmatic functions within a larger discourse structure, analyzing them as discourse markers, specifically temporal connectives. In this study based on a corpus analysis of Old Babylonian literary compositions, I argue that in Sumerian discourse, u₄-ba primarily marks perspectival shifts and refocusing, and u₄-bi-a indexes sequential and consequential action.

1. Introduction

Sumerian grammars describe the phrase u₄-bi-a/u₄-ba, literally “on that day/in those days,” as a temporal clause, one of several such clauses.¹ Certain grammars perceive these phrases as mere orthographic variants, whereas some recognize that these two phrases may have distinguished different temporal concepts (e.g., Edzard 2003: 39) and still others have attempted to identify a morphologically based difference (Wilcke 2012).² Although the differences between u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a may have indeed initiated as orthographic variations of the same temporal phrase, I argue that in Old Babylonian (OB) Sumerian literary discourse u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a serve different pragmatic purposes. Both provide narrative scenes with temporal markers—u₄-ba reflects the narrative, simultaneous time of the preceding through a point-of-view (POV) shift whereas u₄-bi-a indicates sequential or consequential time relative to the preceding. In narrative, u₄-ba could be translated “meanwhile” or the like; u₄-bi-a could be translated “then.” This complementary distribution may have been an OB literary innovation.

Both u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a are classified here as discourse markers, that is to say metapragmatic elements that function to structure discourse (speech or text) and to serve as guideposts for interpretation. In Sumerian literary texts, these particles offer telling indications of the movement and pace of the plot. I first discuss the linguistic

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1. See, for example, Thomsen 1984: 98; Edzard 2003: 39; Jagersma 2010: 83; Foxvog 2016: 50; 102–3. Some have termed the phrases “adverbial” (Edzard 2003: 39; Jagersma 2010: 83), while others, apparently, do not (Attinger 1993: 170).

2. As part of a larger discussion about contracted forms involving the locative, the morphology of u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a was the topic of recent conversations between C. Wilcke and P. Attinger, first in Wilcke’s article in a *Festschrift* for Attinger followed by a series of discussions in *N.A.B.U.* (Wilcke 2012; Attinger 2014; Wilcke 2014). Note also the discussion by Balke (2006: 35–38), but with corrections by Wilcke (2012: 371–72). The broader issue of contracted/uncontracted morphology will not be discussed here. Note, however, that discourse markers are typologically short and phonologically reduced.

typology of discourse markers before providing contrasting examples of u_4 -ba and u_4 -bi-a in OB Sumerian literature. I close by examining u_4 -ba/ u_4 -bi-a outside the OB literary corpus.

2. Linguistic Typology of Discourse Markers

Discourse markers (DMs) have taken various names in linguistic research, including “discourse particles,” “pragmatic markers,” and “discourse connectives.”³ Regardless of nomenclature, DMs are pragmatic connectives between discourse units, providing structure, coherence, and interpretative directives. According to B. Schiffrin (2001: 62), “[DMs] function in cognitive, expressive, social and textual domains, [that is] simultaneously on different planes of discourse.” Schiffrin (1987: 322–25) underscored the deictic qualities of DMs, comparing them to indexicals, since DMs are “inherently context-bound” and provide pragmatically relevant information, indexing a discourse unit to either a speaker/hearer (writer/reader) and a preceding/subsequent utterance or text).⁴

The use of DMs does not contribute to truth-conditional content; rather, “discourse markers ... provide information about how the propositional content ... should be interpreted” (Fox Tree 2010: 278).⁵ That is, the use of a DM does not alter the semantic content of an utterance; rather, it informs how the utterance is to be contextualized and understood. In Sumerian, for example, there is no propositional difference between the following:

u_4 -ba zi- u_4 -sud-ra₂ lugal-am₃
 “At that time, Ziusudra was king”
Flood Story Seg. C 11

*zi- u_4 -sud-ra₂ lugal-am₃
 “Ziusudra was king”

The presence or absence of u_4 -ba (or u_4 -bi-a) does not alter whether or not Ziusudra was king. Rather, as I argue, the DMs provide information on how the reader should understand the discourse in relation to the preceding.

DMs are thus flexible and, to some extent, somewhat ambiguous. Nevertheless, they are regular components of natural language, forming a “functional, pragmatic category (instead of a formal, morphosyntactic one) which includes formally heterogeneous items” (Lutzky 2012: 15). Examples of typical English DMs include *but*, *so*, *well*, *moreover*, *therefore*, *such as*, *in other words*, *after all*, and many others.

According to A. Jucker and Y. Ziv (1998: 3), following L. Brinton (1996: 33–35), prototypical discourse markers present the following features:⁶

- Phonological and lexical features
 - Short and phonologically reduced
 - Form a separate tone group
 - Marginal forms; difficult to place within a traditional word class
- Syntactic features
 - Restricted to sentence-initial position
 - Occur outside the syntactic structure or are only loosely attached to it

3. In 1998, Fraser 1998: 301 gives fifteen different terms; Lutzky, in 2012, provides nineteen (Lutzky 2012: 9–10). Note the warning by D. Blakemore that not all items treated under these various terms are necessarily the exact same phenomenon (Blakemore 2004: 221). See also the discussion by J. Fox Tree (2010: 269–70) regarding defining and delineating discourse markers.

4. On indexicals, see especially Levinson 1983: 54–96 and Silverstein 1993.

5. On approaches to this aspect of DMs, see Blakemore 2004: 227–31.

6. See also the analysis of each of these features in Lutzky 2012: 12–29

- Optional
- Semantic features
 - Little or no propositional meaning
- Functional feature
 - Multifunctional, operating on several linguistic levels simultaneously
- Sociolinguistic and stylistic features
 - Feature of oral rather than written discourse; associated with informality
 - Appear with high frequency
 - Stylistically stigmatized
 - Gender specific; more typical of women's speech

Although one might quibble with the universality of these features, many DMs analyzed in various languages exhibit several of these. Sumerian u₄-ba/u₄-bi-a adhere to several of these prototypical features. Phonologically and lexically, u₄-ba is reduced and, as phrases, neither fits well into a traditional word class, although most would consider them adverbial in nature. Syntactically, u₄-bi-a does seem to be restricted to sentence-initial position; u₄-ba is typically sentence-initial. Both are indeed syntactically optional and offer very little propositional semantic content. As I demonstrate below, both DMs are multifunctional. The sociolinguistic and stylistic features are more difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain. They do not appear to be more typical of women's speech.

My analysis of u₄-ba/u₄-bi-a associates them with a subset of DMs, namely, with discourse connectives. Levinson alluded to DMs in his discussion of discourse deixis, where he considered the following:

[T]here are many words in English, and no doubt in most languages, that indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse. ... It is generally conceded that such words have at least a component of meaning that resists truth-conditional treatment. What they seem to do is indicate, often in very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains them is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse (Levinson 1983: 87–88).⁷

English discourse connectives include words such as *so*, *therefore*, *and*, *then*, and *y'know*. These types of discourse markers direct and reposition the deictic center, that is, the point of reference of the utterance or narrative.⁸

Temporal connectives such as u₄-ba/u₄-bi-a belong to the categories of temporal adverbials and discourse connectives. According to Borillo et al. (2004), temporal connectives provide the following relations: narration, result, explanation, elaboration, continuation, topic, background, and contrast. Modern French *alors*, for example, would fall into the category of temporal connective (Le Draoulec and Bras 2007).

Since DMs are multifunctional, *alors* may be employed far more robustly, as Mosegaard Hansen demonstrates. In her analysis, the uses of *alors* fall into a “radial category [...] a category comprising central and less central members, where the latter are not predictable from the former, but [are] nevertheless motivated by them. ... there need be no one property which is common to all members, rather such categories are structured by chaining links from one member to another” (Mosegaard Hansen 1998: 332–33). Thus, she perceives the following uses of *alors*: (1) reperspectivization and reorientation, (2) foregrounding, (3) results or conclusions. She provides one example of reperspectivization in which one speaker uses *alors* to indicate a subtopic of the conversation.

A: (h) *euh ils ont fait disparaître un tas de textes ou de choses qui la concernaient donc y a des zones d'ombre là terribles, et puis **alors** un truc/ on n'a rien vu, dessus mais on a vu simplement au musée, c'est euh: l'époque ils appellent ça L'HERESIE:: amarnienne, avec comment il s'appelle euh:*

B: *Akhénaton* (Mosegaard Hansen 1998: 336–37)

7. Levinson discussed these as conventional implicature.

8. On deictic center, see Levinson 1983: 61–68.

In this example, A's use of *alors* marks an illustration—an aside—of the broader topic of what the speakers consider *des zones d'ombre là terribles* in Egyptian history.

In another example of “discourse embedding” indexed by *alors*, one of these speakers offers a parenthetical observation before resuming the discourse.

... *et il me semble que c'est dans celui-ci/ elle nous a/ sur de:s des colonnes;(h) y a vraiment, des carouches, **alors** je sais plus si c'est le crocodile,, (h) ou,, ouais avec des têtes et vraiment pour l'instant c'est une énigme*
... (Mosegaard Hansen 1998: 340)

This example also illustrates the foregrounding function of *alors* since it highlights the parenthetical within the whole of the discourse. Thus, *alors* can redirect and/or refocus the discourse within the frame of the topic.

Finally, following Mosegaard Hansen's (1998: 350) analysis, *alors* has a resultative–sequential function, marking actions consequential to the preceding, as in:

*Jean a tiré. **Alors** Pierre s'est écroulé.*

Thus, Modern French *alors*, a temporal adverb, has attained a broader pragmatic function as a DM, usages that have been grammaticalized from its temporal origins.

The majority of research on discourse markers has focused on spoken discourse or on spontaneous written dialogue such as texting or instant messaging. Nevertheless, some research has utilized traditional written text as corpora,⁹ even in ancient texts and (literary) compositions.¹⁰ C. Kroon and R. Risselada analyze Latin *iam* and provide several examples of its temporal use:¹¹

eius libertum Apollonium **iam** tum equidem, cum ille viveret, et magni faciebam et probabam
“**already** then, when he was still alive, I had a great regard and liking for his freedman Apollonius”
(Kroon and Risselada 2002: 69)

sex menses **iam** hic nemo habitat
“for six months **already**, nobody has lived here”
(Kroon and Risselada 2002: 70)

Much like *alors*, however, *iam* is polysemous and multifunctional. Kroon and Risselada (2002: 75) demonstrate that *iam* also has a focusing function:

“aperi” inquit “**iam** scies”
“open the door” said a voice “(**and then**) [**soon**] you will know”
(Kroon and Risselada 2002: 75)

Iam id porro utrum libentes an inviti dabant?
“**As to THIS**, furthermore, did they pay that willingly or reluctantly?”
(Kroon and Risselada 2002: 73)

9. See, for example, Brinton 1990, 1996; Goss and Salmons 2000; Lutzky 2012.

10. Note, for example, Bakker and Wakker 2009 and Bonifazi, Drummen, and de Kreij 2016 on ancient Greek; Ghezzi and Molinelli 2014 on Romance languages including Latin; Kroon 1995, 1998, 2011, 2014 and Langslow 2000 on Latin; Miller 1999, Di Giulio 2005, and Moshavi 2007 on Biblical Hebrew; and Inglese 2016 on Hittite.

11. Note also Mosegaard Hansen 2014 on comparison of *iam* with Medieval French *ja* and Modern French *déjà*.

Thus, Kroon and Risselada have shown that ancient languages also utilize discourse markers and these too may be multifunctional. In their analysis, *iam* serves both temporal and focusing pragmatic functions within a given discourse structure. These examples, however, represent dialogue. Kroon's studies on other Latin DMs such as *ceterum* demonstrate how DMs structure narrative.

Ceterum du mea res geritur, L. Sulla quaestor cum magno equitatu in castra uenit, quos uti ex Latio et a sociis cogeret, Romae relictus erat

“**But** during these events [i.e. the attack on the fortress] the quaestor L. Sulla arrived in camp with a large force of cavalry, which he had mustered from Latium and the allies, having been left in Rome for that purpose.

(Sallust, *Jugurthine War* 95–96.1 from Kroon 2011: 189)

In the following section, I demonstrate that u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a may also be analyzed as multifunctional discourse markers that provide discourse cohesion in Old Babylonian Sumerian literary narratives.

3. u₄-ba/u₄-bi-a as Discourse Markers in Old Babylonian Literature

Neither u₄-ba nor u₄-bi-a can be ascribed a single discourse function. Rather, much like other DMs surveyed above, these two Sumerian DMs offer multiple possibilities that guide the reader in her understanding of the text. The temporal characteristic of each, however, is undeniable, and, based on this analysis of OB literature, I would suggest that the uses of u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a were grammaticalized from that temporal nature, analogous to some of the above examples.¹²

As discourse markers, u₄-ba/u₄-bi-a manage the narrative temporally in one of two ways: firstly, by advancing the story through narrative sequencing and secondly, by refocusing within the given timeframe from an alternative perspective a point of view (POV) shift. In narrative sequencing, the second scene temporally progresses relative to the preceding scene. The two paragraphs may have a causal relationship, the second occurring as a result of action in the first. In POV shift, a paragraph is followed by a second paragraph that reimagines the same time from a different vantage point. The deictic center is shifted to a different participant, but the timeframe remains the same relative to the initial deictic center. Morphologically, the discourse indexicality of u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a is evident in the anaphoric origins of -bi, which although employed temporally, nevertheless provides the coherence structure of discourse units, situating the marked discourse unit within a particular context.¹³ In OB Sumerian literature, narrative sequencing is more commonly signaled by u₄-bi-a, whereas point of view shift is typically indexed by u₄-ba. Each DM, however, builds upon these primary aspects to offer further pragmatic functions.

To collect tokens of these DMs efficiently, I utilized the corpus of compositions available on the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL) that encompass most of the Old Babylonian literary corpus. In this corpus of composite compositions, u₄-ba is used ninety-six times and u₄-bi-a sixty-three times.¹⁴ Of the tokens of the DMs occurring in nonfragmentary analytically viable contexts, u₄-ba exemplifies the proposed analysis nearly 84

12. On the grammaticization of discourse markers, see Brinton 1990, 1996; Traugott 1995, 2004; Schwenter and Traugott 2000.

13. On deictic -bi, see Woods 2001: 87–95 and 2005. Note, however, once again, Wilcke and Attinger's discussion of the morphology (see note 2 above).

14. To maintain the synchronic analysis of compositions primarily attested in the OB period, I omitted occurrences of the DMs from the Gudea Cylinders (one each). Although utilizing composites is not ideal, I cite them here for the sake of simplicity. On variants, see below.

percent of the time (78/93);¹⁵ *u₄-bi-a* over 71 percent of the time (35/49).¹⁶ In this corpus, both DMs are restricted to narrative, even when occurring in what are typically considered hymnic compositions, further attesting their use as narrative structuring devices. Syntactically, *u₄-ba* occurs within a sentence in noninitial position only ten times (slightly more than 10%); *u₄-bi-a* always occurs in initial position.¹⁷ The following examples demonstrate the discourse pragmatics of first *u₄-ba* then *u₄-bi-a* before contrasting the two markers.

3.1. The Discourse Marker *u₄-ba*: Perspectival and Refocusing Marker

In OB literature, *u₄-ba* primarily indexes a POV shift within the temporal timeframe of the preceding.

[iri gud huš^{an} uraš ni₂ gal guru₃^{ru}]

...

^dinana-ra en aratta^{ki}-ke₄

saġ-men kug-sig₁₇-ga mu-na-ni-in-ġal₂

...

u₄-ba en šaġ₄-ge pad₃-da ^dinana-ke₄

kur šuba₂-ta šaġ₄ kug-ge pad₃-da ^dinana-ke₄

en-me-er-kar₂ dumu ^dutu-ke₄ ...

“City, furious bull of heaven and earth, shining in awesome splendor

...

“The lord of Aratta placed a golden crown on his head for Inana

“**At that time**, the lord, whom Inana favored

“Whom from Kuršuba Inana favored in (her) holy heart

“Enmerkar the son of Utu ...”

(*Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* 1, 28–29, 33–35)

The opening lines of this composition situate the narrative as a “once upon a time” story about the city of Uruk. After the initial prologue and the introduction of the lord of Aratta, *u₄-ba* introduces the main protagonist of the story, Enmerkar. The actions of both the lord of Aratta and Enmerkar take place in the established timeframe. As signaled by *u₄-ba*, the perspective shifts from the lord of Aratta to Enmerkar, but the temporal setting remains the same.

Correspondingly, *u₄-ba* often occurs immediately following an opening mythical prologue, establishing that the narrative is set within that time but focusing on a particular aspect of the story.¹⁸ This perspectival focusing may introduce a primary actor or important setting.

15. Many questionable uses are concentrated in a single composition, the *Lament over Ur*; six out of seven uses are ambiguous or contradictory to the present analysis. These tokens frequently occur at the beginning of a new *kirigu*, and therefore at the beginning of a new discourse structure, a syntactical oddity. This placement further makes these difficult to analyze in relation to the preceding, since the end of a *kirigu* should mark the close of a discourse structure. I cannot determine any clear reason(s) for what would seem to be an alternative idea of the use of *u₄-ba*. In contrast, the *Lament over Sumer and Ur* uses *u₄-ba* six times, all compatible with the view presented here.

16. Included within these numbers are cases of repetition.

17. A sentence here is simplistically defined as a network of phrases ending in a (finite) verb.

18. On these mythological openings, see especially Streck 2002 as well as Michalowski 1991 and Rubio 2013. See also the discussion of enjambment related to mythological openings followed by *u₄-ba* in Alster 1975: 54: “First the idea of ‘in those days’ is expanded into three parallel lines, and then the following group of lines is introduced by a resumption of the same idea by the word *u₄-ba* ‘in those days’. Such resumptions ... serve to provide a link between groups of phrases which tend to form separate units although syntactically they could not stand alone.”

u₄ re-a-ta u₄ an ki-bi-ta ba-an-[bad²-ra²-a-ba]¹⁹

...

u₄-ba ġeštug₂ daġal mud diġir šar₂-šar₂ ġal₂-ġal₂

^den-ki-ke₄ engur buru₃ a sur-ra ki diġir na-me šag₄-bi u₆ nu-um-me

ki nud-ni i₃-nud u₃-ku nu-um-zi-zi

“In those ancient days when heaven and earth were [separated]

...

“**At that time** —there was the exceedingly wise one, the creator of the greatest gods.

“In the deep *engur*, in the watery deep, a place no (other) god has seen, Enki lay on his bed;

“Sleeping, he would not arise.”

(*Enki and Ninmah* 1, 12–14)

Here, the narrative proper begins and is set within the already established timeframe. The mythological prologue presented a broader cosmological setting; the use of u₄-ba signals a perspectival focusing with the introduction of the sleeping Enki, whose inactivity propels the plot forward. Many other OB Sumerian literary compositions begin with such a mythological prologue which features the world or a city in a prehistoric time before using u₄-ba to focus on a major actor or plot that marks the beginning of the story.²⁰

Similarly, the *Curse of Agade* presents a brief “historical” prologue before employing u₄-ba in this perspectival role.

saġ-ki gid₂-da ^den-lil₂-la₂-ke₄

kiš^{ki} gud an-na-gin₇ im-ug₅-ga-ta

e₂ ki unug^{ki}-ga gud mah-gin₇ sahar-ra mi-ni-ib-gaz-a-ta

ki **u₄-ba** šar-ru-gen₆ lugal a-ga-de₃^{ki}-ra

sig-ta igi-nim-še₃ ^den-lil₂-le

nam-en nam-lugal-la mu-un-na-an-šum₂-ma-ta

u₄-ba eš₃ a-ga-de₃^{ki} kug ^dinana-ke₄

ama₅ mah-a-ni-še₃ im-ma-an-du₃-du₃

ul-maš^{ki}-a ^{giš}gu-za ba-ni-ib-gub

“Once Enlil’s frown

“Had killed Kiš like the Bull of Heaven,

“Once he had slaughtered the house of Uruk-place in the dust like a mighty ox,

“When **at that time** Enlil had given rulership and kingship

“From lowlands to highlands to

“Sargon the king of Agade—

“**It was then that** holy Inana decided to construct the shrine of Agade

“As her splendid woman’s quarters,

“To set up a throne in Ulmaš.”

(*Curse of Agade* 1–9)

The double use of u₄-ba here further demonstrates both the temporal setting signaled by u₄-ba and the way the DM shifts perspective. In both instances, the discourse unit introduced by (ki) u₄-ba is temporally established

19. The reconstruction here follows Ceccarelli 2016 rather than ETCSL. See also Lambert 2013: 330–45

20. *Enlil and Ninlil, Enmerkar and Ensuhkešdāna, Enlil and Sud, Inana and Šukaletuda, Marriage of Martu, How Grain Came to Sumer, Pabilsag’s Journey to Nippur, The Rulers of Lagaš.*

within the same narrative timeframe as in the preceding discourse, that is, at the time after Enlil had removed kingship from Kiš and Uruk and passed it to Agade.²¹ Furthermore, each use of *u*₄-*ba* shifts the perspective: first, from the preceding cities to Sargon and Agade; second, from kingship to Inana and her dwelling in Agade.

In *Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird*, the perspectival shifting function of *u*₄-*ba* moves the reader from Lugalbanda to the Anzud bird. Lugalbanda, having cared for the Anzud bird's chick, leaves and waits for the bird to return from the mountains.

u₄-**ba** mušen-e am kur-ra-ka gu₂ mi-ni-ib-gur-gur
anzu^{mušen}-de₃ am kur-ra-ka gu₂ mi-ni-ib-gur-gur

“Meanwhile, the bird was herding wild bull in the mountains,
“The Anzud bird was herding wild bull in the mountains.”
(*Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird* 63–64)

Here, the narrative moves from focusing on Lugalbanda's activities and, through *u*₄-*ba*, shifts to the Anzud bird. Anzud's activities occur simultaneously with Lugalbanda's; only the location and the primary actor change.

In *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, the famous “Spell of Nudimmud” uses *u*₄-*ba* three times to emphasize to the reader how communication between Enmerkar of Uruk and the Lord of Aratta was made possible.

u₄-**ba**²² muš nu-ġal₂-la-am₃ ġiri₂ nu-ġal₂-la-am₃
kir₄ nu-ġal₂-la¹-[am₃] ur-maḥ nu-ġal₂-la-am₃
ur-ġi₇ ur-bar-ra nu-ġal₂-la-am₃
ni₂ teġ₃-ġe₂₆ su zi-zi nu-ġal₂-la-am₃
lu₂-ulu₃ gaba-šu-ġar nu-tuku-am₃
u₄-**ba** kur subur^{ki} ḥa-ma-zi^{ki}
eme ha-mun ki-en-ġir₁₅ kur gal me nam-nun-na-kam
ki-uri kur me-te ġal₂-la
kur mar-tu u₂ sal-la nu₂-a
an ki niġin₂-na uġ₃ saġ si₃-ga
den-lil₂-ra eme l-am₃ ḥe₂-en-na-da-ab-dug₄
u₄-**ba** a-da en a-da nun a-da lugal¹-la
den-ki a-da en a-da nun a-da lugal-la¹
a-da en-ne a-da nun-¹ne a-da¹ lugal-la
den-ki en ḥe₂-ġal₂-la dug₄-ga zi-¹da¹
en ġeštug₂-ge igi lugal¹ kalam-ma-ke₄
ġeštug₂-ge pad₃-da en eridug^{ki}-ga-ke₄
ka-ba eme kur₂-kur₂ en-na mi-ni-in-ġar-ra
eme nam-lu₂-ulu₃ l i₃-me-¹am₃

“At that time, as there was no snake, as there was no scorpion,
“As there was no hyena, as there was no lion,
“As there was no dog or wolf,

21. On ki *u*₄-*ba*, note Cooper's observation that the same phrase also occurs in *Sargon and Ur-Zababa* (Cooper 1983: 27). Regardless of the intertextuality of the phrase, its usage in both compositions reflects a perspectival shift in extremely similar narrative contexts. In *Sargon and Ur-Zababa*, the preceding lines focus on Ur-Zababa; ki *u*₄-*ba* marks a POV shift introducing Sargon as the protagonist.

22. One exemplar (source Jn in Mittermayer 2009) perhaps gives *u*₄-*bi* rather than *u*₄-*ba* at line 141. The surface is somewhat abraded, but collation confirms Mittermayer's reading; the traces suggest *bi* rather than *ba*.

“As there was no fear or trembling.
 “As humans had no rival.
 “**It was then that** the lands of Subur and Hamazi,
 “The distinctly tongued, Sumer, the great mountain, the essence of nobility,
 “Akkad, the land possessing the befitting,
 “And the land of Martu, lying in safety—
 “The totality of heaven and earth, the well-guarded people,
 “(All) proclaimed Enlil in a single language.
 “**It was at that time**, because of the lordly contest, princely contest, and royal contest,
 “Enki, because of the lordly contest, princely contest, and royal contest,
 “Because of the lordly contest, princely contest, and royal contest,
 “Enki, the lord of abundance and true word,
 “The lord chosen in wisdom who watches over the land,
 “The expert of all the gods,
 “The chosen of wisdom, lord of Eridu,
 “(Enki) placed an alteration of the language in their mouths.
 “The speech of humanity is one.”
 (*Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* 136–155)

The passage sets the stage for the dialogues between the two rulers. Each of the three sections explicates how the dialogues could occur. The use of u₄-ba in the so-called Spell of Nudimmud passage indicates that the three sections within the passage should be viewed as depicting the same period of time, with different points of focus.²³ Moreover, since the first strophe begins with u₄-ba, that initial paragraph and thus the whole of the Spell of Nudimmud passage is temporally connected to the preceding lines that included Enmerkar’s instructions to his messenger. Thus, the passage describes neither a remote past nor a distant future, but instead occurs in the time of the narrative, as already suggested by C. Mittermayer (2009: 57–62).

In OB literature, u₄-ba consistently fulfills the function of a temporal connective, which repositions the focus of the narrative, forcing the reader to focus on something new. Temporally, u₄-ba connects the discourse that it introduces with the preceding, situating both within the same narrative time.

3.2. The Discourse Marker u₄-bi-a: Consequential and Sequential Marker

The preceding analysis demonstrated that u₄-ba was used in relatively consistent and predictable contexts with specific functions. In contrast, u₄-bi-a is more varied in its usage. At times, u₄-bi-a encroaches upon the types of functions I have argued are associated with u₄-ba, but such examples are rare or ambiguous. Nevertheless, u₄-bi-a primarily indexes sequential or consequential action.

lugal-ĝu₁₀ ĝiš-gi daġal mu-e-šum₂ nunuz ki ha-ba-ni-ib-tag
 ...
u₄-bi-a niġ₂-bun₂-na lu₂ du₁₄ mu₂-a-ke₄ lu₂ har-ra-an gig-ga-ke₄
 ...
 niġ₂-bun₂-na gi-du₃-a-ĝu₁₀ ba-ni-in-bur₁₂-bur₁₂²⁴

23. Thus, van Dijk’s 1970 interpretation, which temporally separates the third section from the preceding two, may be rejected.

24. I follow Peterson 2007 against ETCSL for this line.

“My king, you gave me a broad reedbed, so that I could lay eggs
 “...
 “**But then** the turtle, the quarrelsome, he of the troublesome way
 ...
 “The turtle was uprooting my nest.”
 (*Heron and Turtle* Seg. A 80–100)

šag₄ la-la gal₂-la-na
 kiġ₂-bi im-mi-in-til
 u₄-bi-a^diškur diġir-ra-ni
 ġi^šgu-za ka-silim-ma-ka-na
 gal-bi dur₂ mi-ni-in-ġar

“(Sin-iddinam) happily completed the work. **Afterwards**, he greatly seated Iškur, his god, on his throne of glorification.”
 (*Sin-iddinam E* 66–70)

In the first example, the heron relates his story to Enki. First he built his nest. The next event in his narrative, signaled by u₄-bi-a, involves the turtle’s destruction of his nest. In the second example, although the preceding lines are broken, the hymn makes clear that Sin-iddinam has built a throne for Iškur. Logically, the throne must be completed prior to Iškur assuming his place. The use of u₄-bi-a acknowledges the sequence—Sin-iddinam has finished making the throne and only then can he seat Iškur upon it. In both cases, the activities in the discourse unit prior to u₄-bi-a necessarily precede the actions initiated by u₄-bi-a. Thus, u₄-bi-a indexes sequential action.

The use of u₄-bi-a as a sequencing DM in *Debate between Bird and Fish* contrasts to u₄-ba as marker of perspectival shift as used in the example from *Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird* above. In the *Debate*, Fish decided to destroy Bird’s nest and smash the eggs.

ku₆-e mušen-ra mu-ni-in-sig₁₀-sig₁₀ a-e ba-da-an-kar
 u₄-bi-a mušen igi piriġ-ġa₂ umbin hu-ri₂-in^{mušen}-na
 gud₃-bi-še₃ a₂ dub₂ i₃-ak-e dal-le-bi saġ im-gi₄

“Fish repeatedly struck out against Bird and fled (back) into the water.
 “**Then**, Bird—lion-faced and eagle-clawed—
 “Flew back to its nest and blocked the passage.”²⁵
 (*Debate between Bird and Fish* 109–111)²⁶

In both this example and the previous from *Lugalbanda*, one protagonist acts in the other’s nest. In *Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird*, u₄-ba shifts the perspective to what the Anzud was doing while Lugalbanda was caring for its chicks. In *Debate between Bird and Fish*, u₄-bi-a carries the narrative to the next event.

The consequential use of u₄-bi-a operates similarly to the sequential function.

ʾku₆ mušen-biʾ ġi^š-gi ambar-ra im-mi-in-si
 ki-gub-bi in-ne-en-pad₃

25. On this translation, see Karahashi 2000: 136–37.

26. The line order is confused among the exemplars (Herrmann 2010: 228–30). Following S. Herrmann, we could insert after the line about fish: mušen-e gud₃-bi-še₃ igi tab-ba a₂-ur₂ ba-bur₂-bur₂, “Bird, seeing (this) spread his wings (to return) to its nest.” The use of u₄-bi-a in the following line functions as partially consequential.

ġiš-hur-bi igi-bi im-mi-in-zu
u₄-bi-a ku₆-e ʾambar-ra¹ nunuz ki ba-ni-in-tag
 mušen-e ka ġiš-gi-a-ʾka¹ gud₃ im-ma-ni-ib-us₂

“(Enki) filled the reed beds and marshes with fish and birds.

“He instituted their positions

“And informed (them) of their rules.

“**So** Fish laid his eggs in the marsh;

“Bird built his nest in the entrance of the reed bed.”

(*Debate between Bird and Fish* 19–23)

Fish and Bird take up their proper place in the marsh and reed bed after Enki has established the rules. Moreover, they seem to act according to Enki’s instruction. The consequential use of u₄-bi-a is naturally an extension of the sequential function.

min₃-kam-ma-še₃ mušen-e ku₆-e in-še₃ mu-ni-in-dub₂
u₄-bi-a ku₆-e mušen-ra imin ba-ab-du₈ igi huš um-mi-in-ši-il₂

“Once again, Bird insulted Fish.

“**So** Fish denounced Bird. Having glared angrily (at him), (he said) ...”

(*Debate between Bird and Fish* 137–138)

(Fish speaks to himself)

u₄-bi-a ku₆-e mušen-ra sa₂ im-sig₁₀-sig₁₀-ge

“**Therefore**, Fish plotted against Bird.”

(*Debate between Bird and Fish* 102)

In both examples, u₄-bi-a marks actions resulting from what preceded. In the first example, Fish, having endured more of Bird’s vitriol, proceeded on his own rant. In the second example, Fish’s internal monologue results in his actions initiated by u₄-bi-a.

One interesting use of u₄-bi-a is in the introduction to *Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*, repeated three times. After Enki’s so-called “Journey to the Netherworld,” a new discourse unit is introduced with u₄-bi-a.²⁷

u₄-bi-a ġiš diš-am₃ ġiš[†]ha-lu-ub₂ diš-am₃ ġiš diš-am₃ ġiš[†]taskarin diš-am₃
 gu₂ id[†]buranun-na kug-ga-ka du₃-a-bi

“**At that time**, there was a single tree, a single *halub* tree, a single tree, a single boxwood,

“Planted on the bank of the pure Euphrates.”

(*Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld* 27–28)²⁸

In the proposed analysis, the use of u₄-bi-a rather than u₄-ba would signal that this discourse unit is sequential or resulting from the preceding. In her analysis, Gadotti understands the u₄-bi-a as directing back to the whole

27. On which, see most recently Gadotti 2014: 14–21.

28. The section is, of course, repeated two more times by Inana, but explicitly in Emesal. Notably, in the second iteration (*GEN* 70), three of the five exemplars which preserve the opening give u₄-ba rather than u₄-bi-a. All other exemplars that preserve the phrase in question in any of the three iterations give u₄-bi-a.

prologue. However, u_4 -ba and u_4 -bi-a always reference the immediately preceding. The u_4 -bi-a, in the present analysis, would indicate that either the existence of the tree is contingent upon Enki's battle to sail to the *kur* or else that the tree grew on the Euphrates in a time subsequent to Enki's journey. If indeed u_4 -bi-a is used sequentially or consequentially here and is not an instance of u_4 -bi-a being used as u_4 -ba, then the storm that Enki battles and the storm that befalls the tree are not the same. Thus, while the contrastive functions of u_4 -ba and u_4 -bi-a suggested here may prove helpful in some cases of problematic interpretation, they are not always definitive.

The debate literature features an additional discourse function of u_4 -bi-a, one which conforms to more typical usages of DMs in modern conversation analysis. In the debates, u_4 -bi-a is used as a turn-taking signal. This function is grounded in the sequential use of u_4 -bi-a, but is more specifically oriented to mark the end of one discourse and the beginning of a change in speaker. In this use, however, u_4 -bi-a summarizes the preceding before the next speaker can take up the conversation.

(Fish's speech)

u_4 -bi-a ku₆-e mušen-ra in-še₃ mu-ni-in-dub₂

"**Thus** Fish insulted Bird."

(*Debate Between Bird and Fish* 51)

(Bird's speech)

u_4 -bi-a mušen-e ku₆-ra mu-na-ni-ib-gi₄-gi₄²⁹

"**Thus** Bird retorted to Fish."

(*Debate Between Bird and Fish* 56)

(Plough's speech)

u_4 -bi-a ud-de₃ gu₃ he₂-eb-be₂

"**Next**, Storm spoke up."

(*Hoe and Plough* 179)

The final example ends a speech and simultaneously marks the beginning of the next discourse, indeed introducing a completely new interlocutor (Storm), who had not been previously involved in the discussion. This token of u_4 -bi-a certainly evinces a perspectival aspect that overlaps with more typical u_4 -ba functionality, but the sequentiality conforms to the patterned uses of u_4 -bi-a detailed here.

Most likely, this usage is highlighted in the debates because of the dialogic structure. However, u_4 -bi-a seems to function in this manner elsewhere upon the conclusion of direct speech, often with a resulting action as in the example of Fish's plotting against Bird above or Inana's decision to set off for Eridu below.

3.3. u_4 -ba and u_4 -bi-a in direct contrast

The two words rarely co-occur in the same contexts. Indeed, compositions only infrequently employ both DMs. The few cases which do offer a direct contrast are informative. Both uses of u_4 -ba/ u_4 -bi-a occur at the beginning of the story *Inana and Enki*. The discourse set begins after Inana's monologue about going to Eridu:

29. One exemplar (Herrmann's An) substitutes min₃-kam-ma-še₃ for u_4 -bi-a. Note also the variant in MS 2110/1 o ii 7: 'u₄-bi-a mušen-ra' ku₆-ra im-ma-'gub gu₃'¹ mu-na-de₂-e' e'¹, "Thus, bird stood before fish and yelled at him" (Mittermayer 2014).

u₄-bi-a ki-sikil ^dinana
 abzu eridug^{ki}-ga ^den-ki-ga-še₃
 kug ^dinana-ke₄ ġiri₃-ni dili mu-un-gub
u₄-ba ġeštug₂ dirig me zu an ki-a
 ki-tuš-a-ni-ta šag₄ diġir-re-e-ne-ke₄ ši-in-ga-zu-a
 kug ^dinana-ke abzu eridug^{ki}-ga-še₃ danna nu-ub-te-a-aš
 [^den-ki] 'lugal' abzu-ke₄ niġ₂-nam-e zu-a
^den-ki lu₂ gu₃ mu-un-de₂ a₂ im-ma-an-aġ₂

“Then the young woman Inana

“Towards Enki in the Abzu of Eridug

“Holy Inana journeyed alone.

“Meanwhile, the one of exceptional knowledge, who understands the *mes* of heaven and earth,

“Who from his dwelling also knows the hearts of the gods

“Before holy Inana had come within a double mile of the Abzu of Eridug,

“Enki, master of the Abzu, who knows all, called (his) man and instructed him.”

(*Inana and Enki* Seg. B 6–13)

In the preceding soliloquy, Inana determines that she will go. As signaled by u₄-bi-a, she then sets off on her journey. After the narrative describes her movement, we get a POV change while Inana is going. While Inana is still on her way, at that same moment, Enki gives his man instructions. The use of u₄-ba signals that the narrative viewpoint has shifted from one subject to another, from Inana to Enki. The two actions—Inana’s journey and Enki’s instructions—occur within the same narrative time. This section of *Inana and Enki* demonstrates the contrastive use of u₄-bi-a for narrative sequencing and u₄-ba for perspectival shift.

Manuscript variations in which u₄-bi-a is substituted for u₄-ba or vice versa are relatively rare, suggesting that the scribes did not view them merely as orthographic variants, but rather as elements in complementary distribution. I have noted all relevant variants for the examples used in this article. While interesting, none dramatically detract from the suggested understanding.³⁰

4. u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a beyond Old Babylonian Literature

I have argued that in OB literary compositions, u₄-ba consistently indexes perspectival shift and u₄-bi-a regularly indicates narrative sequencing. The corpus of OB Sumerian literature, however, presents a limited and constrained picture of Sumerian grammar. I briefly discuss the use of u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a in royal inscriptions as a test case for extending the functional and pragmatic perspective proposed above. Although u₄-ba does appear to serve as a DM throughout its use in Sumerian, the rare occurrences of u₄-bi-a outside of the OB literary corpus indicate that the latter is a morphologically explicit variant of u₄-ba.

Outside of the OB literary corpus, particularly in royal inscriptions, attestations of u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a offer possible alternative analyses. Notably, whereas u₄-ba occurs as early as Eanatum, u₄-bi-a does not appear until Urukagina and, even then, is extremely rare. Therefore, u₄-bi-a could be regarded as a morphologically explicit derivative of u₄-ba, which itself had been phonologically reduced, a common feature of DMs. In Third Millennium royal inscriptions, instances of u₄-ba mark POV shifts just as in OB literature.

30. See note 27 above.

(Listing of building projects)

u₄-ba

en-an-na-tum₂-me

ganun mah

urub^{ki}-ba

mu-du₃

“It was **then** that Enannatum built the magnificent storehouse in Urub.”

(Enannatum I 10 iii 2–6)

Among the rare occurrences of u₄-bi-a, however, those in OB inscriptions seem to serve similar functions as u₄-ba, namely perspectival shift within the contextual timeframe. Notably, u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a seem to be viewed as interchangeable within the u₄ ... u₄-ba/u₄-bi-a sequence common in OB inscriptions.

ʽu₄ an¹-ne₂ ʽen-lil₂ ʽen-ki-ke₄

...

nam-lugal larsa^{ki}-ma

ma-ni-in-šum₂-mu-uš₂-a

u₄-bi-a ma-da igi-nim-ma

larsa^{ki}-da

gu₂ ha-ba-an-da-tuku³¹

“Because when An, Enlil, and Enki had given me kingship of Larsa, it was **then** that the highlands became hostile toward Larsa.”

(CUSAS 17: 37 iii 15–21)

Other attestations of u₄-bi-a in OB royal inscriptions, however, signal narrative sequencing.

ʽis^{ti}tukul lu₂ erim₂-ma-ḡa₂

dur₂-bi-ʽše₃¹ bi₂-gi₄-a-ta³²

u₄-bi-a

uḡnim kalam-ma-ḡu₁₀

ba-ʽra¹-mu-til³³

“Although once I had destroyed the weapons of my enemy, the troops of my homeland did not stop **then**.”

(CUSAS 17: 37 iii 37–41)

The preceding discourse logically precedes the statement introduced by u₄-bi-a and is grammatically marked as such ((u₄)—ta). The use of u₄-bi-a in this instance corresponds to the typical usage in OB narratives. Moreover, the usage of u₄-ba throughout this inscription is consistent with the DM usage presented here.

The OB royal inscriptions perhaps present a different conception of discourse grammar for these DMs than that in OB literature. It may be that u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a in the inscriptions are conflated under Semitic influence since both correspond to a single Akkadian temporal word *inūma*.

31. On gu₂...tuku, see Volk 2011: 79.

32. On dur₂-bi-ʽše₃...gi₄ and the parallel to ʽis^{ti}tukul lu₂ erim₂-ma-na ib₂-ta-an-haš-a-ta from Samsi-iluna 1 24–25; see Volk 2011: 80.

33. The form ba-ra-mu-til also occurs in this same inscription at ii 74; see further Volk 2011: 78.

OB royal inscriptions with copies in both Akkadian and Sumerian notably use u₄ ... u₄-ba and u₄ ... u₄-bi-a interchangeably, where both are equated to *īnu* ... *īnūšu*. The Sumerian versions of these inscriptions likely reflect their Akkadian counterparts without the benefit of the nuanced distinction observable in literary compositions from the period. Perhaps u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a were innovatively reanalyzed as complementary DMs within the scribal schools, possible evidence of continuous change in scribal contexts.³⁴

5. Towards an Understanding of Sumerian Discourse Structure

The present study has been an attempt to understand discourse in OB Sumerian literature, focusing on functional/pragmatic rather than formal/morpho-syntactic considerations. In this corpus, both u₄-ba and u₄-bi-a are characterized by multiple features that are typologically common to discourse markers and may be classified with temporal connectives. Moreover, they may have been grammaticalized from a temporal clause to perform polysemous and multifunctional discourse functions, belying a depth in the pragmatic structure of Sumerian narratives. Whereas u₄-ba seems to have served as a DM of perspectival shift, even outside the constrained corpus of OB literature, the typical usage of u₄-bi-a as a sequential and consequential DM in OB literature seems to be unique to that corpus. The present study should provide additional rationale for future examinations of grammar beyond the morpho-syntactic level in order to investigate the broader discourse structure and pragmatics of Sumerian.

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34. See, e.g., Wagner, Outhwaite, and Beinhoff 2013 and, for Sumerian, Brisch 2007. Further research distinguishing between the grammars and discourse structures of these corpora is required. Moreover, whether such pragmatic reanalysis occurred for other phrases cannot be further evaluated here.

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