SUMERIAN GRAMMAR TODAY

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The recent book, *The Sumerian Language*, by Marie-Louise Thomsen provides a valuable survey of the field of Sumerian grammatical studies today and constitutes a reliable and unbiased guide to its many differences of opinion. The scope of the book thus invites consideration of many questions of a general nature. Those here addressed are (1) the question of when Sumerian ceased too be a living language, (2) implications of distrust of our sources, (3) questions of periodization, (4) of assumptions of phonetic change, (5) of the precision of the terms animate-inanimate for the Sumerian genders, (6) of the terms for the verbal prefixes, (7) of the terms *ḫamṭu* and *marû*, (8) "asyntactic" and "subordinate," (9) "pronominal conjugation," (10) "Mes-anepada construction," and (11) the meaning of the term Emesal. A final section deals with a few details.

O, Things are frequently what they seem
And this is Wisdom's crown:
Only the game fish swims upstream,
But the sensible fish swims down.

                              Ogden Nash

TO PICK ONE'S WAY THROUGH the wilderness of conflicting ópinions that the field of Sumerian Grammar has become is no easy task, so the appearance of a competent and comprehensive guide such as Marie-Louise Thomsen's *The Sumerian Language*[1] is warmly to be welcomed. It presents a substantial and well documented account of Sumerian Grammar, largely along the lines of the Falkenstein school, but it also refers to and reports statements of other opinions at the appropriate places, thus charting broadly the various positions maintained by individual scholars in the field. The reports are brief but informative and fair. In most cases evaluation of the merits of the reported positions are left for the reader to decide for himself. Two new and welcome features are a comprehensive list of verbs with classification of type of root, and a full bibliography. The indices are very useful and practically arranged. There can be little doubt that Thomsen has rendered a signal service to the field of Sumerology with her book. It should become part of every Sumerologist's library.

This said, a prospective reviewer may well pause and realize with some concern that the wide range of

the book and the degree to which it leaves decisions of right or wrong to the reader tends to make his task one of trying to evaluate not just a book but in fact the formidable array of conflicting opinions of an entire field if he is not to betray his convictions by silence. To attempt, however partially, that task it will seem reasonable to address in the main only questions of method, terminology and similarly broad issues to avoid drowning in details. We shall therefore here take up in the order of the various chapters of the book such general questions as they seem to us to raise. We may consider first that of:

When did Sumerian die?

On page 17 it is assumed, following Gelb and Cooper, that Sumerian began to disappear as an everyday language as early as the Akkadê period so that by the time of Ur III use of it had become very limited and that in the following OB period it must be regarded as a dead language spoken only in the scribal schools where it was learned as a foreign language.[2] To this gloomy view must be said, however, that there seems to be little or no solid evidence to support these assumptions[3] and that if accepted

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[1] Marie-Louise Thomsen *The Sumerian Language, An Introduction to its History and Grammatical Structure.* Mesopotamia 10. Copenhagen 1984. Pp. 363.

[2] I. J. Gelb "Sumerians and Akkadians in Their Ethno-Linguistic Relationship" *Genava* 8 (1960) 258–271 and J. S. Cooper "Sumerian and Akkadian in Sumer and Akkad" *Orientalia* N.S. 42 (1973) 239–46.
[3] The main points cited are (1) that Akkadian names of scribes occur in colophons of the ED III Sumerian texts from Abu-Salabikh. This cannot be taken as evidence that

they would entail strange consequences indeed. Thus one would have to explain why the royal inscriptions intended to proclaim the fame of the kings of Isin and Larsa were not written in a language that people

Abu Salabikh at that time was an Akkadian speaking community, for scribes, as much needed specialists, must be thought of as highly mobile and not necessarily representative of the general population where they worked. Since the North at that time was both literate and Akkadian speaking they may well have come from there. (2) In dealing with the Akkadê people Gelb wrote "In the South, that is in Sumer, the Sumerian language was used regularly, but even there Akkadian letters and economic documents occur frequently". This fails to take account of the fact that most of the Akkadian documents we have from the South, e.g., from Girsu, come from the Akkadian garrisons placed there and staffed with people from Akkadê. (3) A further point made by Gelb is that "During the Sargonic period we meet for the first time with a number of Akkadian geographical names scattered through the Empire, such as names composed with *Dûr-*or *Maškan-* testifying to the colonizing activities of the Sargonic ruler". Here, however, it should be noted that maškan was a loanword in Sumerian and as for *Dûr-* we know of no place name in the South composed with it rather than Sumerian Bàd-. It may also be noted that we have no evidence of any colonizing activity of the Sargonic rulers, only of the establishment of military garrisons staffed with people from Akkadê. (4) About the period of Ur III Gelb wrote that "the country as a whole continued in the direction of total Akkadization and elimination of Sumerian elements. This can be clearly established by the growing number of Akkadian personal and geographical names in the South of the country, of Akkadian loanwords in Sumerian, and by the fact that the last three rulers of the Ur III dynasty bore Akkadian names in contrast to the first two rulers, whose names are Sumerian." Here, since Gelb's presentation of his arguments was in a paper read at the Rencontre Thureau-Dangin and so did not allow extensive documentation, it is difficult to know what specifically he had in mind. As indicated above we do not believe that there was any movement in the direction of total Akkadization at this time. As for personal names, a look at the list of personal names of Ur III date from Girsu such as is given by Reissner in his *Tempelurkunden aus Telloh* (See now also *Studi per il vocabolario Sumerico* 1/2 [1985] pp. 236–450) shows an overwhelming preponderance of Sumerian names with only a very small number of Akkadian ones. As for Šu-Suen and Ibbi-Suen(Amar-Suen is Sumerian, formed with the Sumerian genitive element [-ak] and may not be read as Bûr-Sîn) it should be noted that Shu-Suen's mother Abīsimtī likewise has an Akkadian name. She may well have been a princess

could understand, as were such inscriptions in Babylon and other Akkadian speaking countries in the north, but in a dead tongue accessible only to a small group of learned men. By the same token, one asks oneself why documents of vital importance to people, marriage contracts, sales, loans, leases, etc., were not in Akkadian as they were in the north, but in the by then supposedly unintelligible Sumerian. One would think, further, that a wife berating her husband would use the language they were wont to speak with each other, yet in the letter HSM 911.5.31 of Ur III or early Isin-Larsa date[4] the wife scolds in Sumerian, not Akkadian. Declarations of passionate love could very well be made in Akkadian, we have some very fair examples, so if Akkadian were the language of the court under the last kings of Ur it seems odd that the girls of the ardent lovesongs to Šu-Suen vented their feelings to him in Sumerian only; and must one assume that the bards who recited the propagandistic royal hymns and long Sumerian myths and epics were all performing before audiences that did not understand a word of what they were saying? Such incongruities give pause and invite consideration of other more simple possibilities, in the spirit of Ogden Nash, and when the total literature of a people, all its written documents, are in one language it would seem simplest to assume that this language was in fact the one that people spoke. We therefore assume that Sumerian was still spoken as everyday language in the south in the Ur III period and a major part of the Isin-Larsa period as well. After that it survived as a living tradition in the schools into the Old Babylonian period much in the manner Latin survived sporadically, in the Middle Ages. It may also, as suggested by Lieberman,[5] have survived sporadically also outside the schools, in homes, villages and some cities. That in fact it did so is now shown by an anecdote the point of which is that an Akkadian speaking citizen of Isin does not understand the Sumerian which is the commonly used language in Nippur, in this case spoken by a woman gardener engaged in weeding, pulling

from the north of the empire and may have chosen to give her son an Akkadian name. It thus says nothing about what language was spoken at court and in the capital.

[4] D. I. Owen, "A Sumerian Letter from an Angry Housewife (?)" in *The Bible World, Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon* (New York, [1980]), pp. 189–202.

[5] S. Lieberman, *The Sumerian Loanwords in Old Babylonian Akkadian I.* Harvard Semitic Studies 22 (Cambridge, Mass. 1977) p. 20 note 50.

up reeds. The anecdote may be dated to as late as the middle Babylonian period around 1000 B.C.[6]

Distrust of Sources

The belief that Sumerian died out early as a spoken language leads logically to profound scepticism about the authority of sources later than the assumed cut-off point, that is to say about the major part of the corpus we have to work with.[7] However, while a reasoned critical attitude is of the essence of good scholarship, one unduly sceptical is fully as naive and prejudicial to gaining reliable knowledge as is one unduly trusting; for once it has been decided that our sources are generally suspect it becomes natural to see all unexpected and difficult features as due to corruption, without seriously considering the possibility that our own limited and rough knowledge might be at fault and need revision. Thus, even a scholar as meritorious and influential as the regretted Falkenstein could allow himself to write in his Gudea Grammar: "Hier sei aber schon auf eine Tatsache hingewiesen, die in der Formenlehre immer wieder hervortritt dass nämlich lautliche Regeln ausserordentlich viele Ausnahmen ausweisen, ohne dass Ursachen für die Abweichungen gefunden werden können. Diese Erscheinung muss als Anzeichen dafür gewertet werden dass das Sumerisch schon zu Beginn der neusumerischen Zeit in ein Verfallstadium eingetreten ist,"[8] without seriously considering the possibility that these many exceptions might well indicate a need to reconsider and perhaps reformulate the rules we have set up.

The tendency to see exceptions from accepted rules as due to corruption in our sources is fairly general in the field and not particular to Falkenstein, so it cannot surprise to find it well represented in the work under review. On page 142 at the end of § 279, it is stated that: "The pronominal prefixes /-n-/ and /-b-/ may exceptionally occur in intransitive/one part. forms. Such occurrences must surely be regarded as scribal error or mistakes."

Similar comments are found on page 167 example (340) on the form (a-)ab-tu-lu "is loose", p. 176 example (374) on ḫé-en-ga-me-da-an-ku₄ku₄ "may enter with you", p. 167 example (341) on ba-an-zalag "brightened", and p. 204 example (535) to inim ḫé-eb-gi₄ "may be called back". The possibility that the texts are correct and that -n- and -b- can serve in localistic function as indirect objects besides their use as agenitive/ergative elements, and that such localistic function is in fact their more original one, is not considered.[9] On page 167 example (341) the comment to ud-bi-a ᵈGilgameš₂ en Kul-aba₄ᵏⁱ-ke₄ inim guruš uru-na-šèᵃ šà-ga-ni an-ḫúl ur₅-ra-ni ba-an-zalag(a:-ka)... "On that day Gilgamesh, the lord of Kulaba,—his heart was glad because of the word of his young men—he was in high spirits" reads in part: "The grammar is corrupt: Gilgameš-... ke₄ is ergative, but an-ḫúl must be an intransitive verb. For an- as a sort of stative prefix see §319." However, if one is willing to trust the text it seems natural to see šag.ani as subject of the intransitive verb a.n.ḫúl and ur.ani similarly as subject of the intransitive ba-n-zalag and the /-n-/ as localistic and resuming the -šè "because of". The element /e/ of Gilgameš.... ke₄ is here not used in its agentive/ergative function but with dative force.[10] Thus "For Gilgamesh the lord of Kulaba, his heart became glad, his liver bright at the words of his young men". On p. 168 in §319 the form ab-g̃ar-re = *iš-ša-ak-ka-an* given in *OBGT* 5 221 is thought to be wrong: "Note that the last form is corrupt: in Sumerian texts the verb g̃ar cannot have the *marû* ending -e, the *marû* form of g̃ar is g̃á-g̃á." It should also be noted, however, that the dismissed form does not stand alone but is one of seven consecutive forms of g̃ar followed by /.e/ listed by the text and translated as Akkadian "Presents", also that a similar form [i]n-da-g̃e¹-ré-e-en = *ta-ša-ᵣka¹-áš<-šū>-um* occurs in *OBGT* 5 10 and that the forms in-g̃ar- = *i-ša-ka-an* and in-g̃ar-re-dè = *i-ša-ka-nu* are listed in *MSL* 1 p. 5 ii.14-16 besides in-g̃á-g̃[á] = [*i-ša-ak-k*]*a-an* and in-g̃á-g̃á-e-dè = [*i-ša-ka-a*]*n-ú* etc. all of which invites further consideration. We hope to deal with these forms elsewhere in the near future. Lastly there is p. 201 example (511) na ga-e-ri na-

[6] Antoine Cavigneaux, "Texte und Fragmente aus Warka (32 Kampagne)" no. 1 *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 10 (1979) 111–7 cf. E. Reiner, "Why do You Cuss Me?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 130/1 (1986) 1–6.

[7] Such scepticism ranges from the assumption of distortion from Akkadian by way of bilingual speakers, to artificiality, inner structural breakdown and total corruption by copyists insufficiently familiar with the language.

[8] A. Falkenstein, *Grammatik der Sprache Gudeas von Lagaš I. Schrift- und Formenlehre.* Analecta Orientalia 28 (Rome, 1949) par. 9, p. 38.

[9] A discussion of this use of /n/ is given by me in *AS* 16 p. 96 second column of note 17.

[10] For this use of /-n-/ see the preceding note. For the use of /-e/ as mark of personal dative see Falkenstein *ZA* (n.s.) 11 pp. 181–83 and note that it occurs by preference after the genitive element -ak.

ri-g̃u₁₀ ḫé-e-dab₅ with the comment: "-e- is in
both forms incorrect; 'may you follow my instruc-
tions' should be: */ḫa-ĭ-b-dab₅-en/ᵓ ". The phrase
occurs also in the Lugalbanda Epic line 211 and in
"Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World" (UET
6 56) line 56. In the case of the first verb all sources
write ga-e-de₅ (thus better than -ri) and since na-
de₅ construes the person or group instructed in ades-
sive (-e . . . -ni-) the form is most naturally analyzed
as "let me(ga-) instruct (na . . . -de₅)you (-e)" with
-e- constituting the 2p.sg. adessive infix (-e.e) or
perhaps better /-∅.e-/. The form written ḫé-e-dab₅
is less clear, however, it is given by all sources except
Lugalbanda MS.Q and "Gilgamesh Enkidu and the
Nether World" (*UET* 6 56 1.56) and so can hardly be
a mere scribal mistake. Perhaps one may follow Poebel
GSG §642 and assume that optative ḫé- is here
combined with what he termed Permansive, that is, a
Perfective form with Prefix /a-/ to express wish for a
state. The verb dab₅ may be assumed to have its
sense "to instruct", "to induce (someone) to (do some-
thing)", Akkadian *šûḫuzu*. Thus ḫé followed by a
2p.sg. Perfective form of the a- paradigm: e-dab₅
would mean "may you remain instructed", i.e., be
convinced", the form corresponding to an Akkadian
**lu šûḫuzata*. We may add that we are not certain that
this is the right explanation, but we stay with it until
someone comes along with a better one. The essential
thing is to be slow to dismiss difficulties with the easy
assumption of mistakes by the Ancients.

We reiterate that what we advocate is an attitude
neither uncritically ready to blame the sources for any
difference with our preconceived ideas, nor uncriti-
cally accepting them at all costs, but one willing to
consider and, when indicated, to reconsider. An open
mind allowing that the Ancients may have known
what they were doing.

Periodization

In the matter of periodization Thomsen follows the
scheme proposed by Falkenstein except that she in-
cludes his "Archaic period" in the following "Old
Sumerian" one. She thus recognizes (1) "Old Sumer-
ian" for ED III, (2) "Neo-Sumerian" for Gutian and
Ur III, and (3) "Old-Babylonian Sumerian" or "Post-
Sumerian" for the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian
periods.

It is refreshing to see that in doing so Thomsen is
fully aware that the basis on which these periods were
distinguished is not linguistic in nature but general
historical only, so that accordingly they "reflect the
historical periods during which the texts are written

down more than the development of the language"
(p. 26). From a linguistic point of view though, this is
awkward since it joins together what linguistically is
separate, and separates what linguistically belongs
together; thus, since these periods are to represent
periods of language, it would be more consistent to
use linguistic criteria. In so doing one would recognize
(1) an Archaic Period characterized by absence of
vowel harmony in the verbal chain and a preference
for the prefix sequence al- (2) "Old Sumerian Period"
characterized by vowel harmony in the verbal chain
changing the prefix i- to e- before a following element
with /a/. It lasted to the middle of the Akkadê Period
and was followed by (3) "Standard Sumerian" begin-
ning with Naram-Suen and characterized by a return to
the use of i- also before following /a/. The language
of this period is that of the royal inscriptions and legal
and epistolary texts of the Ur III period, as well as of
the majority of Sumerian literary works which we
have for the most part in copies of Old Babylonian
date.[11] Following "Standard Sumerian" in the develop-
ment of Sumerian one should probably recognize (4)
a "Late Sumerian" period, characterized by various
new developments such as loss of the gender distinc-
tion of personal and nonpersonal and the appearance
of a verbal conjugation with (me). It may here be
necessary to make further subdistinctions according
to genre such as "Royal Inscriptional" "legal" etc.
since some of the features, e.g., the /me/ conjugation,
are not general but restricted to specific genres.[12]

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[11] These copies will occasionally show a scribal mistake,
and, more frequently, influence from later orthography, but
that cannot alter the basic character of the language copied;
rather, the remarkable fidelity of even much later copies is
quite amazing. A few words may be said about the examples
of linguistic errors quoted on p. 30. We are not convinced
that si bí-in-si-sá serves as variant of si . . . sá-sá since
a verbal root si = *ešēru* occurs. (See *CAD* E. s.v. *ešēru*).
The writing si bí-in-si-sá may thus merely be a different
orthography to be read si bí-in-si-si₈ or even si bí-in-
ˢⁱsi₈: Nor is the dative ᵈUtu-lugal-g̃á = *a-na* ᵈ*Šamaš
be-lí-ia* wrong. It is correctly dealt with in §181 with the
example lugal-g̃á ù-ne-dug₄. It occurs also in Inanna's
Descent line 91. nin-g̃á ga-na-ab-dug₄ and /a/ with
dative force is part of the 3p.dative infix -na-. In the phrase
lugal lugal-e-ne-er the post-position is not the personal
dative mark but the -r(a) that denotes "out of". It may thus
not be corrected to -a.

[12] See Poebel *GSG* §§456–63. To this period belong com-
positions like the "Exaltation of Istar" (Thureau-Dangin *RA*
[1914] p. 144–45, Langdon *RA* [1915] p. 74–75) and to the

Before leaving the subject of periodization one should perhaps consider the possibility of refining the very rough scheme here proposed, or perhaps replacing it with a more suitable one. Unfortunately, the extremely limited and specialized character of our older materials causes difficulties. The fact that a linguistic feature is attested only for a relatively late period does in no way exclude the possibility—most often the probability—that it is an old and established feature of the language which just happens not to have been recorded in one of our few early texts. To establish the likelihood that a feature is an innovation in the period at which it is first attested it is therefore necessary to show that it directly replaces an older different feature in the preceding period or periods. This, of course, given the fact of very limited data, is not often possible, and when it is not it is important to realize that the feature at issue may very well have been part of the language for ages and that in the great majority of cases it probably was.

Phonetics

Attempts to deal with the many bewildering complexities of Sumerian Grammar have shown, and still show, a distinct tendency to seek to reduce the number of different grammatical features of the texts by assuming that the observed differences are the result of purely phonetic, non-phonemic developments. Thomsen is here commendably restrained but a number of such reductions, old and new, still figure in her book.

The tendency may be said to have begun with Poebel, who assumed that the verbal prefix a- was a mere phonetic variant of the more frequent i- (*GSG* §542) even though no phonetically valid reason could be given and even though the grammatical texts differentiated by translating perfective forms of the a-series as Akkadian permansives, those of the i- series as preterites.[13] Poebel also considered the verbal prefix sequence mi-ni- to have developed from mu-ni-by vowel assimilation although the two forms occur side by side, at times even in the same inscription, from Gudea down to Samsuiluna and although there is nothing to explain why vowel assimilation would have occurred in one form and not in an identical

other.[14] Thus in both cases grammatical distinctions were obliterated. Many other similar cases could be cited.

Falkenstein took over Poebel's assumptions and went farther along the road indicated. One may mention as an example his treatment of the element -mi- of the prefix sequence im-mi-, which he considered a phonetic variant of an original 3sg. non-personal Locative-Terminative infix *be>*bi which is nowhere preserved in its original form (§ 66.3). After the prefix i- this original *be>*bi developed into mi, a phonetic change for which Falkenstein referred to §11.1.6. There, however, the b>m change is listed as "spontaneous" (*Spontane Konsonanten Veränderung ... bei Bildungselementen) which is but another way of saying that there is no reason whatever why such a change should take place. Moreover, in all other cases than after i- this *be>*bi is supposed to develop into -ni-, by assimilation if it follows a prefix consonant /n/, and by dissimilation of it follows a prefix consonant /m/ or /b/. Apart from the natural hesitations one might have to assume such elaborate, phonetically unmotivated changes from a purely hypothetical original form, there is the fact that these assumptions would eliminate entirely the clear phonemic contrast of /m/ as mark of ventive with /b/ as mark of ablative, a contrast that can be documented from Presargonic texts down to the grammatical paradigms which we have in Old Babylonian copies.

In Thomsen's treatment the prefix sequences imma- and immi- are supposed to have developed from ĩ-bi- which adds to Falkenstein's assumption that of a supposed nasalization of the prefix i-. This assumption rests on the use of the sign ì/NI to write the prefix i-, but as Thomsen notes, this sign does not elsewhere represent /ĩ/, only simple /i/, e.g., in i-bi- ù-bi-and nasalization would also have to be assumed for its allophon /e-/ in O.S. texts even though there is nothing to suggest that the sign E with which it was written ever had a nasalized value. Finally, as already

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rather elaborate Sumerian of this period refer lexical series such as Erimhuš and Antagal.

[13] See Poebel *GSG* §§542-43. In earlier studies Poebel kept them apart. So, commendably, does Thomsen §§316-21.

[14] See Poebel *GSG* §568 and note "Feste Regeln für das Eintreten oder Nichteintreten des Umlauts in der Zeit vor Samsuiluna lassen sich bis jetzt noch nicht aufstellen" which must give pause. For Gudea Cyl. A note [sag] an-šè mi-ni-íb-íl i.2, igi mu-ni-dug₈-àm i.18; mi-ni-kuš-ù i.23, má mu-ni-ri ii.5; ud mi-ni-ib-zal-zal-e v.9; ud mu-ti-ni-ib-zal-e xix.2 and passim. In Samsuiluna's building inscription for Dur-Samsuiluna (Poebel *AfO* 9 [1i33/4] pp. 242-244) note ú-gù m[i-n]i-in-dé-a i.19; šu mi-ni-in-bar-ra ii.15 alongside of sag-bi. ... mu-ni-in-íl iii.11-12, nam-a-ni-éš mu-ni-in-tar-re-eš iii 23-24, and sag-e-éš mu-ni-in-rig₇-eš iii.25.

mentioned, there is no evidence to indicate, and no reason to suppose, that the -ma- of imma- goes back to -ba, or the -mi- of immi- to bi, or mu of immu- to a nonexisting -bu. Nowhere else does a nasal before /b/ change it to /m/ cf., e.g., anbar "iron", ambar "marsh", šembi "kohl", umbin "claw" etc. as well as the sequences nam-ba- and nam-bi- listed by Thomsen on p. 158, note 49.

Another contrast supposed to be only phonetical in nature is that of the infixes -ra- and -ta-. Thomsen considers it possible that -ra- stands for -ta- after ba- "but phonetic reasons for a change ba-ta > ba-ra cannot be given" (§465). Here, it is true, -ra- and -ta- are so close in meaning that it is very difficult to say where the difference between them lay, but that they cannot be identical is clear from the fact that they can occur together in a form, and rank differently in it, -ra- precedes -ta-; it follows from the very manner in which ranks are distinguished[15] that this excludes any possibility of identifying them. Generalizing from what has been said we would deem it methodologically correct to view with extreme skepticism any and all proposed phonetic developments that operate "spontaneously" and only in some, not in all, of identical phonetic environments: particularly so when accepting them could result in the suppression of phonemic contrasts.

Animate: Inanimate

The categories described as animate and inanimate (p. 49) are those represented, e.g., by the contrastive possessive pronominal suffixes -ani "his", "her" and -bi "its", "their", and they are further defined by

Thomsen in accordance with current usage of the terms in the field as "Animate are persons Inanimate are things and animals". This, however, is hardly consistent with the inherent meanings of "animate" and "inanimate" which denote respectively "having life" and "never having had life". Thus animals cannot be correctly described as inanimate, nor for that matter can groups of people, who also fall into the supposed "inanimate" category when seen as collectives. We prefer therefore not to use these terms and to refer to the two categories involved more accurately as "personal" and "nonpersonal".[16]

Terms for Prefixes

Moving on from Animate: Inanimate to considering other terms used in the field one may pause at the terms for the verbal prefixes, a designation Thomsen uses according to its basic meaning as designating any affix that precedes the root. In subdividing the prefixes she very properly relies on rank and recognizes three groups according to whether the prefixes they contain must, can, or cannot introduce the form in which they occur even though the distinction between "must" and "can" is not overtly recognized. In naming these subdivisions she rejects the traditional term for the last group, "infixes" on the grounds that in grammar generally that term is restricted to affixes occurring inside the root, which is not the case with the Sumerian affixes thus named. For this reason, it would seem, she chooses content rather than formal criteria as basis for her terminology, recognizing modal prefixes, the prefix al-, Conjugational prefixes, Case prefixes, and Pronominal prefixes. These are all good and clear terms with the exception only of the term "Conjugation prefix". To conjugate a verb normally means to modify it according to tenses, modes, voices, persons and numbers, none of which functions, in fact, belong to the prefixes in question but rather to the modal prefixes and to the ones called "pronominal" prefixes. However, to find a better, generally acceptable term based on meaning to replace it is hardly possible due to the great differences in scholarly opinion, and so it is understandable that Thomsen retained "conjugation prefix" as traditional and for

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[15] Rank can be defined as follows: Observing all known verbal forms we may distinguish as rank Prefix 1 all elements found to occur immediately before the verbal root only, as rank Prefix 2 all elements found to occur immediately before the root or before an element of Prefix 1 only, as rank Prefix 3 all elements found to occur immediately before the root or before elements of ranks, Prefix 1 or Prefix 2 only, and so forth. Correspondingly Suffix Rank 1 will consist of elements occurring directly after the root only, Suffix Rank 2 of elements occurring directly after the root or after an element of Suffix 2 and so on. Cf. Gleason, *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics* (New York 1955) pp. 112ff. It follows from the principles on which the rank classes have been distinguished that two elements beloning to the same rank can never occur together in a form; they are potential substitutes, "replacives" of one another and so mutually exclusive.

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[16] For slaves sometimes being counted as things, *res*, as in Roman law note the occasional construction of inim.... ĝar "to claim" as bí-in-ĝar[ar] (*NSGU* 1 87.10) or [ini]m bí-in-ĝar-ra (*NSGU* 1 96) instead of mu-ni-in-ĝar. As for animals, note that they are moved into the "personal" category in fables where they act as persons.

practical reasons only. As for the prefix al- we can see no reason to allot separate status to it rather than analyze it as the prefix a- followed by a separate prefix 1.[17] The term Case prefix is good and descriptive. It could well be extended to include the "pronominal" prefixes which actually represent "absolute" or "zero" case prefixes to be analyzed as -n.∅—and -b∅—, parallel in structure to the inessive -n.a- and the adessive -n.i-.

Considering the terminology as a whole, it seems clear, however that there still are certain drawbacks. Basing the terminology on criteria of meaning introduces an element of subjective judgment as in the comments just made about "conjugation" prefixes and al-, yet the main thing to be said against it is rather the purely practical observation that it is a bit cumbersome. We are therefore inclined to retain as an alternate set of one word terms for ready reference that of profix, prefix and infix denoting respectively prefixes that must, can, and cannot begin a form. It has the advantages of brevity and of objective, purely formal basis. That the special technical meanings assigned to "profix" and "prefix" are necessarily arbitrary and that other grammars use the traditional "infix" differently seems to us relatively minor drawbacks.[18]

Ḫamṭu and Marû

Passing on from the prefixes to the verbal root we can be brief since we hope to deal with the problems of the core complex of the verb in some detail elsewhere. Thomsen continues the use of the now fashionable terms ḫamṭu and marû, which is to be regretted. These terms add nothing that was not known before. They refer to the aspects of the Akkadian verb wrongly called Preterit and Present and confirm by their meanings "quick" and "slow" Landsberger's designation of their function as punctive and durative. The lexical texts use them to restrict arbitrarily the meanings of Akkadian verbs so that they can be used to translate Sumerian verbal roots that are inherently

thus or similarly limited (Aktionsart). By using ḫamṭu and marû untranslated all that is achieved is to mystify and to ignore the known grammatical information they convey. They should be replaced by meaningful terms such as Punctive and Durative or Perfective and Imperfective.

Though Thomsen retains ḫamṭu and marû her discussion of their meaning in §238 is to the point: completed action versus action in progress. One might wish to qualify her statement that Perfective "expresses states and results of action" to refer only to forms with the prefix a- which are normally rendered as permansives in Akkadian. To judge from the translations in examples (251), (255) and (256) Thomsen had in mind, rather, meanings such as those of English Perfect and Old Babylonian t-Perfect. These are, however, not stative but merely indicate completed past action of immediate importance at a specific moment as, e.g., with Present Perfect the moment of speaking. This particular force, the Sumerian Perfective, can of course have, as shown by the fact that it is used in the Sumerian law codes in places where the stylistically derivative Code of Hammurabi uses the t-Perfect, namely to state the one action which has made the conduct of the accused actionable, made it a crime or tort. Normally, however, the Perfective just presents action as events and should be rendered by simple past, present or future as the context may indicate. In the majority of examples quoted, for instance, simple narrative of past events is involved and the more natural rendering of the forms involved is surely a simple past: ì-mi-dug "he said thereunto" (251), ĝìr nam-mi-gub "resolutely he stepped onto (his boat)", má mu-ni-ri "the boat ran on it (i.e., the canal), (255), á mu-gur "the arms bulged (i.e., with muscles), šu im-mi-du₈ "he took (lit. 'enclosed') in hand (a tablet)" (256). Odd, in view of the correct statement that the imperfective is neutral as to tense, is the translation of it with awkward presents as, e.g., i-si-il-e in example (255) with "he is (now) splitting the waves" rather than "it (i.e., the boat) was cleaving (the waves)" and of inim im-ma-sum-mu with "(Gudea) is now giving a message (to the statue)" rather than "began giving . . . etc." It is the rule both in Sumerian and Akkadian that the *verbum dicendi* which is used to introduce a direct quote is construed as inchoative and so in the imperfective, whereas the perfective is normally used if it follows the quote (See, e.g., *NSGU* III p. 101 s.v. du (g)₁₁. It should be noted, also, that English, and other modern languages do not usually use an inchoative statement in similar cases. Good translation would thus call for a simple past: "Gudea gave a message". We may add before leaving

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[17] Presumably the sonors /l/, /m/, and /n/ were vocalic consonants in Sumerian as they are in many languages. Writings like im or in may well occasionally represent m and n̩ rather than actual im and in which in more precise orthography may have been written ì-im- and ì-in-.

[18] Note, though, that Latin pro indicates absolute beginning, pre mereley anteriority (Benveniste). Incidentally, iri (§415) is not a prefix but a verb denoting "to praise" (*MSL* 13 162.73 i-ri = *nu-'u-[du]*) which construes with the auxiliary e/dug. See *JQR* 76 (1985) 44, note 7.

the subject of *ḫamṭu* and *marû* that one would have welcomed a reference to Poebel who in *GSG* §§443–86 gave the correct explanation of the function of the various types of stems and in *AfO* 9 p. 264 and *AS* 14 98 showed the relation of stems like e and dug₄ to Akkadian socalled Present and Preterit, also to Landsberger, who is *MSL* 4 p. 21* note 1 established the meaning "slow" for *marû* and the use of *ḫamṭu* and *marû* as grammatical terms for punctualis and durative respectively.[19]

"Asyntactic" and "Subordinate"

For constructions with bare stem participle and -a stem participle such as (lú) dub sar and lú dub sar-ra Thomsen introduces the terms "asyntactic" and "subordinate".

Apart from the question whether new terms are really needed here, the suitability of the suggested terms seems not beyond doubt. Thomsen explains the use of "asyntactic" for the sequence (lú) dub sar "tablet writing man" in paragraph 505 as follows: "the nouns in the non-finite construction occur without case postpositions. Therefore they are called an "asyntactic sequence of nouns and verbs." However, as generally used "syntax" denotes the ways in which words are combined to form sentences; and to form lú dub sar two such ways are used, (1) attribution, holding between the phrase dub sar and lú, and (2) government, the participle sar governing in its aspect as verb the noun dub in the absolute case (here accusative). The complete phrase contains thus two different syntactic relations and so cannot very well be called asyntactic.

It might be objected that dub does occur without overt case postposition, which is true. However, that

very absence of overt mark stands for a specific syntactic relation, that of "absolute" or zero mark case and so is not asyntactic. Nor, it may be added, is occurrence of an overt case postposition in constructions with bare stem participles excluded. An example is ᵈNanna en gal ud an kù-ge si "Nanna, great lord filling light onto the pure sky" (Warad-Suen *UET* 1 300 1–2) which contains the postposition -e of the adessive case.

Lastly one may consider that one of the syntactic relations present in the sequence lú dub sar is that of subordination. The phrase dub sar "tablet writing" is subordinate to the noun lú "man" to which it is in attribution. Accordingly the term "subordinate" used for sequences with a-stem participles such as lú dub sar-ra, translated "the man who has written this tablet", applies with equal right to sequences with bare stem participles such as lú dub sar and so does not lend itself well to serving as distinctive designation of the a-stem sequences.

We would thus prefer to abide by the existing terminology and not change.

Pronominal Conjugation

The term "Pronominal Conjugation" goes back to Thureau-Dangin who in 1932 suggested that Sumerian participles followed by possessive pronominal suffixes represented finite verbal forms. In this he was followed by Falkenstein and—hesitantly and in part only—by Edzard. Thomsen keeps the term but rightly considers the form non finite. The form was correctly interpreted already by Poebel as representing a verbal noun followed by a "subjective" (or an "agentive") genitive, represented either by a possessive pronoun or by a noun in the genitive. A form such as ku₄-ku₄-da-zu-dè "at your entering" parallels structurally exactly Akkadian *ina e-re-bi-ka* which translates it in *AL*³ p. 135:9f. and "at your entering" which would be the corresponding English translation. None of these parallels can be considered as containing a finite verb.[20] Moreover, as mentioned, the construction can occur with a noun just as well as with a pronoun. The construction as found, e.g., in lú šu tag-ga- g̃u₁₀ (*CT* 16 1ff line 278) "the man touched by me" is the same as the one in [m]u-dùg sa₄-a ⌈ᵈ⌉Ba-ba₆-ke₄ (*SAKI* p. 60 a.i. 11) "called by a good name by

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[19] Awkward are also translations such as (203) "when they have allowed me (to do so and so) because of my steadfast prayer", (250) "in the fifth year the wife and daughters of Kuli have run away" rather than "ran away", (773) "after they have ordered" for "after they had ordered", (795) "his cry has been heard" for "being that his cry was heard". (692) "the place from where Ningirsu has looked at the mountains" for "looks at the mountains". The place is the god's seat of judgment from where he keeps an eye on the enemy, the mountains. Lastly it is not clear why the prospective forms with u- in (131) and (644) are translated "has cried" for "had cried" and "have passed" for the correct "had passed" of (620). In (762) é dù-a-ra cannot mean "who has built the house" for building had not yet begun at that point.

[20] Thus, it seems, did also Falkenstein interpret the construction in Gudea Cyl. B v. 4 ku₄-ku₄-da-ni and v. 10 g̃in-a-ni. See *AnOr.* 29 end of §99 and note 2.

Baba" where the agentive genitive is the divine name Baba.ak which is neither pronominal nor a bound part of any verbal form. Thus, since the combination of a verbal noun with a possessive pronominal suffix does not constitute a finite verbal form, and since "conjugation" refers to the inflection of finite verbs and not the inflection of nouns, for which the term declension is used, the term "pronominal conjugation" should be dropped, it is a misnomer.

Mesannepada Construction

A fairly frequent construction consisting of an agentive in -e governed by a following Perfect Participle was named by Falkenstein a Mes-anne-pada construction from the name of the early ruler of Ur that is so construed. Since the term is used by several scholars it is proper and useful that Thomsen should identify it briefly on p. 263. Whether there is any real need for the term, however, may well be questioned. Singling out this particular construction and identifying it, without interpreting it grammatically, merely by exemplifying it, lifts the construction out of the syntactic system of which it forms a part and presents it as a unicum, disparate from any other related constructions. It seems possible that this was actually what Falkenstein intended to do, for while he generally considered the participle in -a a passive participle and translated, e.g., gù-de-a as "der Gerufene" (*AnOr* 29 §99b) he renders Mes-an-ne-pà-da as "Jungling: An hat (ihn) gerufen" thus giving to the bare stem the force of a finite perfective form, (ibid §94.c). Unless one shares this or a similar view that sets the construction apart, it is thus preferable not to use the term but rather continue to see the form as nominal and an integral part of the wider syntactical system of construction of the verbal noun in which it belongs.

Eme-sal

To Parpola's important observation that most of the changes from the main dialect to Eme-sal are due to a shift of articulation forward in the mouth may be added that the word eme-sal also serves to characterize a salt *ṭabat eme-sal-li AHw* p. 214, *CAD* E p. 148. Von Soden translates this as "Frauensalz", *CAD* as "salt of fine taste". *CAD* also suggests that the word when used as name of the "dialect" so called means "fine tongue", "genteel speech" which is not far

off the mark. We would suggest though, a more concrete meaning for sal "thinning", "narrowing" (cf. sal-la = *raqāqu*) and translate the mun-eme-sal as "salt narrowing the tongue," an effect a lump of salt will have if placed on the tongue. Such narrowing or grooving of the tongue will produce a lisping effect such as is represented in the Eme-sal pronunciation of s as th. As for the forward shift it may be noted that the suggestion in §561 that /m/ of the main dialect becomes /g̃/ in Eme-sal, which would contradict it, is based on a misunderstanding. Since g̃>m in Eme-sal the signs ÁG̃ and G̃Á are used in Eme-sal texts with their values ám, èm, and mà, so that one should read gel-le-èm, na-ám, zé-èm and ka-na-àm as also mí da-ám-mà-an-na-ab-dug₄ and mí da-ám-ma-ab-bé in *MSL* 4 p. 43f. As for the place of Eme-sal in the life of the Ancients, we would suggest that it is a "style" of Sumerian rather than an actual dialect, a style meant to be ingratiating and so used for requests. As such it was used in laments, and, since wives were often asked to present requests to their husbands, it was often used by women.

Some Details

The examples quoted throughout the book are taken generally from existing translations by noted scholars in the field, usually from Falkenstein or members of his school. There is much to be said for this procedure which ensures that the translations are representative of the present state of the field and also relieves the book of a cumbersome apparatus of philological notes. For such comment the reader can go to the original publication.

There are, however, also drawbacks. Thus, in recognizing (§238) that "*marû*" is not a tense: Pres/Fut., but an imperfective aspect, Thomsen is ahead of the authors she uses for her examples, they still see "*ḫamṭu*" as Preterit and *marû* as Pres/Fut; yet Thomsen does not adjust their translations, she follows them closely. This leads to odd translations as "presents" of verbs clearly referring to past events. An example is example 115 e-g̃á-g̃á-ne "they pay (5 sheckels of silver)". This comes from a passage that describes earlier conditions done away with by Uru-KA-gina's reforms and can only mean "they were paying . . . etc.". Of such cases of unmotivated renderings of past imperfectives as presents or futures one may list the following examples (19) "speaks" for "said", (944) "says" for "was saying" (58) "says" for "said" (97) "praises" for "praised" (181) and (192) "enters" for "went in with it", (196) "is" for "was",

(359) "places" for "was sitting down" (392) "He is examining the white offering animal, the animal was examined: his omen was favorable" for "he began examining (šu mu-gíd-dè) the white kid, examined the kid completely (šu ì-gíd), and his omen was favorable (ì-šag₅)."

Other details where a different interpretation seems possible and may deserve consideration are:

(3)   "Lagaš expands", better "Lagaš was spreading the hands (on abundance)". šu-peš = *qa-tum wu-ṣú-ú-um* AHw p. 1498. Similarly in (4).

(20)   Read kurum (TAR) as orthographical variant of gurum "to bow".

(24)   sila₄-gaba "lamb carried at the chest as a greeting gift". cf. udu-gaba = *im-mer ir-ti MSL* 7/1 p. 14.84.

(37)   Read hu-mu-kur₄ "I verily entered", i.e., "moved into".

(50)   and (452) "brow" (sağ-ki), not "face".

(61)   "they addressed" lit. "set their face toward". Typical introduction to binding statements made. See references in *NSGU* III p. 122.

(89)   For "brought it" better "gone", lit. "been carried".

(90)   For "return to me" ki-bi ma-gi₄l-gi₄ "be appeased toward me" lit. "return to its place for me".

(105)   "may he"

(113)   and (672) "blessed" (šu-mú is *karābu CAD* K p. 193) "from south and north" would be closer than "everywhere".

(118)   "will be dividing the slave Lú-Baba", i.e., include him in the estate to be divided". Slaves did not inherit.

(122)   "orders settling of the troops".

(126)   "Whether he submits to me or not"

(130)   ì-ge₄-en means "it is true!" or, questioning, "it is true?" Cf. Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta 286, 291, 308 ì-ge-en "it is true".

(170)   and (247), (411). Perhaps better "there I equitably deal with lawcases for my city".

(172)   "moored"

(175)   "She may love me".

(182)   ù-na-dug₄ means "When you have talked with him", i.e., when you have transacted your own business".

(220)   "he was not able to roll (lit. mix) them in the dust".

(251)   ní-ba ì-è-dè "it (the water) was escaping by itself". Answer to the accusation of iii 38–iv.10.

(255)   "Resolutely he set foot in his boat, toward her city Nina the boat sailed on the Id-Nina(š)-ğen, it was cleaving in joy the waves on the canal". All told as past events.

(289)   and (290) gaba-šu-ğar is "opponent", not counterpart" (gaba-ri).

(299)   The sign is dú, not ku₄ so "Gatumdug gave birth to its bricks as desired".

(334)   not "of silver" but "with silver", i.e., as decoration.

(360)   "When" not "as".

(378)   "she took in hand the bright one-nindan (measuring) reed and the iku (measuring) line".

(396)   Translate "my reached out hand rouses holy An from sleep". The reference is to Ningirsu bringing An his breakfast and waking him. Cf. the rousing of Ningirsu in the morning with fresh bread and milk. Cyl. B vi. 4–7.

(400)   dúg-ğá-ğá is "to kneel".

(481)   Cf. note to (182).

(485)   "Now on this day and (under this) sun thus it verily became".

(589)   Read with the corrected text íd a-ba "the river in its (high) water". See Kramer *PAPS* 107 p. 511 note 44 to line 243.

(591)   "How could you give me such a one (én,var.e-ne "her, him").

(661)   "envisaged in the heart" and "that makes seed sprout".

(698)   It is not Ningirsu but the North wind that will be sending rain straight to you".

(767)   better "entering her bedroom".

(780)   "being a man about to build".

(801)   pi-lu₈-da is "customs", "cult". Cf. *AHw* p. 853 *pelludû(m)*, not "abuses".

(826)   "When Enlil let him have his (i.e., Enlil's) strong warrior, Ninurta for bailiff he fashioned for him the *mitum* mace of 50 heads. It is a baked brick on which he (Išme-Dagan) stood his beloved weapon". See Poebel *OLZ* 1931 695ff.

In conclusion it seems fitting to quote Falkenstein's sober statement of 1939 which, unfortunately, is if anything more true today than then. He wrote: "Die Durchsicht der neuesten, 1939 erschienen Grammatik der sumerischen Sprache nötigt zu der betrüblichen Feststellung dass die sumeroglsche Forschung bisher nicht einmal in den gründsätzlichsten Fragen der Grammatik zu einer einheitlichen Auffassung gekommen ist". Under these circumstances the most the individual scholar can do is to seek to clarify to

himself and to others his basic presuppositions and what he bases them on, so that they can be evaluated.

Agreement, even just a reasonable amount, on basic questions of Sumerian Grammar still seems far off indeed. The many limitations of the writing and the corpus of texts available necessitate subjective judg-ment in far too many cases and will continue to do so. As things are, one must, as already said above, be grateful to Marie-Louise Thomsen for the comprehensive, fair, and clear way she has made the various views of the field easily available so that they may properly be taken into account.