

Pronouns in the Sumerian Language in "Curse of Agade" Text

Othman Ghanim Mohammed (*) Muyaed Mohammed Suliman ()**

Received Date: 26/11/2023

Revised Version: 25/1/2024

Accepted Date: 3/2/2024

Available Online: 1/6/2025

Abstract:

The Sumerian text "Curse of Agade" is one of the most important literary and historical works that drew the attention of scribes during the Old Babylonian period, starting from the beginning of the second millennium BC. Even earlier, in the period of its codification—dating back at least to the early 21st century BC during the Third Dynasty of Ur—over a hundred copies of the text were produced. Most of these copies belong to the Old Babylonian era, while some date back to the Ur III period.

This study addresses aspects of Sumerian grammar using The Curse of Agade as a case study, with a particular focus on personal pronouns. The importance of pronouns in any language is well known among scholars, as they serve to connect parts of speech, provide brevity, and eliminate ambiguity. A pronoun typically replaces a noun or refers to something previously mentioned or understood from context. Accordingly, this research aims to shed light on the use of personal pronouns in the Sumerian language as they appear in the Curse of Agade, thereby revealing an essential aspect of Sumerian grammar.

The research is divided into several sections, covering pronouns related to nouns, demonstrative pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and interrogative pronouns found in the text. Examples were drawn directly from lines within the analyzed text. It is worth noting that independent (disjunctive) pronouns do not appear in this text; therefore, they were not discussed in this study.

Keywords: Curse of Agade, Pronouns, Possessive Pronouns, Reflexive Pronouns, Demonstrative Pronoun.

(*)Ph.D. Candidate/ University of Mosul/ College of Archeology/ Department of Ancient Iraqi Languages.

E-Mail: othman_khazer@uomosul.edu.iq

(**) Prof. Dr./ University of Mosul/ College of Archeology/ Department of Ancient Iraqi Languages.

E-Mail: muyaed_ms@uomosul.edu.iq

ORCID: 0000-0003-2527-2048

ضمائر الاسم في اللغة السومرية في ضوء نص "لعنة أكد"

مؤيد محمد سليمان (**)

تاريخ المراجعة: ٢٠٢٤/١/٢٥

تاريخ النشر الإلكتروني: ٢٠٢٥/٦/١

عثمان غانم محمد (*)

تاريخ التقديم: ٢٠٢٣/١١/٢٦

تاريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٤/٢/٣

الملخص:

يعد النص السومري "لعنة أكد" من النصوص التاريخية الأدبية المهمة التي نالت عناية الكتبة في العصر البابلي القديم منذ مطلع الألف الثاني قبل الميلاد، بل ومنذ زمن تدوينه الذي يعود على الأقل إلى بدايات القرن الحادي والعشرين قبل الميلاد في عصر سلالة أور الثالثة، فقد وجدت ما لا يقل عن مئة نسخة من هذا النص غالبيتها قد دونت في العصر البابلي القديم، وبعضها يعود بتاريخه إلى عصر أور الثالثة.

تناولت هذه الدراسة قواعد اللغة السومرية - نص "لعنة أكد" أنموذجاً، وتحديدًا تم التركيز على ضمائر الاسم، إذ لا يخفى على الباحثين أهمية دراسة الضمائر في أية لغة من اللغات، فهي تربط بين أجزاء الجمل، ولها فائدة في الإيجاز والاختصار وإزالة اللبس في الكلام، فكما هو معروف إن الضمير ينوب عن اسم ما، أو شيء ما سبق ذكره أو أنه معروف من سياق الكلام، ومن هنا جاء البحث ليلسط الضوء على دراسة ضمائر الاسم في اللغة السومرية الواردة في نص لعنة أكد بغية التعرف على جانب من الجوانب المهمة في قواعد اللغة السومرية.

تم تقسيم البحث ضمن محاور عدة تناولت الضمائر المتصلة بالاسم، وكذلك ضمائر أسماء الإشارة، والضمائر الانعكاسية وضمائر الاستفهام الواردة في نص لعنة أكد إذ تم اعتماد الامثلة الواردة في أسطر النص المدروس، علماً أنه لم يرد ذكر للضمائر المنفصلة في هذا النص ولذلك لم نتطرق إليها في بحثنا هذا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لعنة أكد، ضمائر، ضمائر التملك، ضمائر انعكاسية، اسم الإشارة.

(*) طالب دراسات عليا/ دكتوراه/ كلية الآثار/ قسم اللغات العراقية القديمة / جامعة الموصل

E-Mail: othman_khazer@uomosul.edu.iq

ORCID: 0000-0002-7950-7941

(**) استاذ دكتور/ قسم اللغات العراقية القديمة/ كلية الآثار/ جامعة الموصل

E-Mail: muyaed_ms@uomosul.edu.iq

ORCID: 0000-0003-2527-2048

Introduction:

Pronouns are fundamental components of linguistic structure, serving critical functions in organizing Sentences, linking sentence elements, and ensuring textual cohesion. Far from being mere substitutes for nouns, pronouns are multifunctional linguistic devices that carry syntactic and semantic weight. They facilitate effective communication by maintaining coherence and enabling speakers to refer to entities without redundancy.

The study of pronouns has attracts considerable attention in ancient languages grammar. In particular, fields such as discourse analysis, and functional grammar have examined how pronouns function in context, how they establish reference. These studies have revealed that pronouns, while seemingly simple, operate within complex systems of reference and meaning negotiation.

This research seeks to explore the importance of pronouns in the Sumerian language, analyzing their grammatical categories and communicative roles. The primary objectives of the study are as follows:

- To highlight the significance of pronouns in sentence construction and overall text coherence.
- To classify Sumerian pronouns based on their grammatical functions and types.
- To review key grammatical and linguistic perspectives on pronoun usage.
- To provide morphological analysis of pronouns in "Gurse of Agade" text.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute to a deeper theoretical and applied understanding of pronouns as essential linguistic elements that influence the structure and interpretation of sentences in Sumerian Language.

(1)Pronouns

The Sumerian language features a variety of pronouns that function in conjunction with nouns and verbs. This discussion focuses specifically on pronominal forms associated with nouns, which can be classified into several distinct categories as outlined below.

(1-1) Possessive Pronoun:

These are possessive pronouns (POS), that constitute one of the components of the nominal chain. They are positioned after the genitive and before the plural marker (*ene*), if the latter is present. The attached pronouns include⁽¹⁾:

Person	Sumerian Possessive Pronoun	Meaning
I.SG.HUM.POS	-ĝu ₁₀	My: First Person Singular Human
II.SG.HUM.POS	-zu	Your: Second Person Singular Human
III.SG.HUM.POS	-a-ni	His/Her: Third Person Singular human
III.SG.NHUM.POS	-bi	Its: Third Person Singular non-human
I.PL.HUM.POS	-me	Us: First Person Plural Human
II.PL.HUM.POS	-zu-ne-ne	Your: Second Person Plural Human
III.PL.HUM.POS	-a-ne-ne	Their: Third Person Plural human
III.PL.HUM/NHUM.POS	-bi	Their: Third Person Plural Human/ Non-Human

(1-1-1) First Person Singular Human

N - POS

202) a uru₂-ĝu₁₀

Ah; City-I.SG.HUM.POS

"Ah, my city!".

(1-1-2) Second Person Singular Human

N-POS

213) gi-gun₄-na-zu

gi-gun₄-na-zu

Chapel (on top terrace)- II.SG.HUM.POS

Your high terrace chapel.

214) iri-zu

City-II.SG.HUM.POS

Your City.

231) im-zu

Clay-II.SG.HUM.POS

Your Clay.

N-N-ADJ – NFV – NOM-POS

254) e₂-gal ša₃ ħul₂-la du₃-a-za

e₂-gal ša₃.g ħul₂-a du₃-a]-zu-a

Palace; inside; ADJ:NFV: joy –NOM; NFV: to build –NOM – II.SG.NHUM.POS- LOC

In your palace built for the joy of the heart.

N N-COM CVN- - - NFV-ed – POS – LOC

260) iri^{ki} tigi-da u₃ nu-ku-ku-za

[(iri^{ki}-∅ tigi-da u₃-∅ nu-ku-ku-e(d)-)zu]-a

City–ABS/ *TIGI*-Drum–COM/ CVN-ABS NEG- NFV:to sleep-to sleep –e-de – II.SG.NHUM-POS-LOC

In your city, where no one will fall asleep to the sound of *TIGI*-Drum.

(1-1-3) Third Person Singular Human

N-POS

101) erin₂-na-ni

erin₂-a-ni

troops –III.SG.HUM.POS

His troops

N-GEN N-POS

99) ^den-lil₂ niĝ₂ du₁₁-ga-ni

^denlil₂-ak niĝ₂ du₁₁.g-a-a-ni

Enlil–GEN/ CVN-ABS - - NFV : to say–NOM- III.SG.HUM.POS

What Enlil said (to Enlil what he said).

N NAM-N-GEN-POS

91) a₂-šita₄-a nam-lugal-la-ka-ni

a₂-šita₄-a nam - lugal-ak-a-ni

equipment; kingship–GEN- III.SG.HUM.POS

His royal equipment.

N-POS-DIR

60) dur₂-ra-ni

dur₂-a-ni- e

residence –III.POS.SG.HUM-DIR

to her residence

N-ADJ-POS-TERM

8) ama₅ maḥ-a-ni-še₃

ama₅ maḥ-a-ni-še₃

Chamber, ADJ:huge (main) – III.SG.HUM.POS- TERM

To her main chamber

N-ADJ-POS-ABL

193) eš₃ gal-gal-la-ni-ta

eš₃ gal-gal-a-ni-ta

Sanctuary, ADJ:great-great–III.SG.HUM.POS –ABL

(Enlil) far away from his great sanctuaries...

The third person singular human possessive pronoun appears in allomorphic form (*na*) if it is followed by the sound /a/:

N-POS-LOC

61) ama₅-na

ama₅-a-ni-a

Chamber –III.SG.HUM.POS- LOC

In her chamber.

69) e₂-šu-me-ša₄-na

e₂-šumeša-a-ni-a

E-Shumisha-III.SG.HUM.POS- LOC

In his temple E-Shumisha.

(1-1-4) Third Person Singular non-human

N-POS

28) kuru₁₃-bi

Pile of grain –III.SG.NHUM.POS

Its piles of grain.

N-POS-DIR

15) uĝ₃-be₂

uĝ₃-bi-e

people –III.SG.NHUM.POS- DIR

To its people.

29) um-ma-be₂

um-ma-bi-e

Old (wise) women –III.SG.NHUM.POS-DIR

To its Old Women.

N-POS-LOC

117) pa-bi-a

Top-III.SG.NHUM.POS- LOC

On its top.

115) ur₂-bi-a

foundation -III.SG.NHUM.POS- LOC

On its foundation.

235) tir-bi-a

forest -III.SG.NHUM.POS- LOC

on its forest.

231) abzu-ba

abzu-bi-a

underground fresh water - III.SG.NHUM.POS- LOC

on its underground water.

43) abulla-a-ba

abulla-bi-a

main gate - III.SG.NHUM.POS-LOC

On its gate.

82) nam-dugud-ba

nam-dugud-bi-a

importance- III.SG.NHUM.POS-LOC

From its importance.

N-POS-ABS N-POS-LOC

219) tum₁₂^{mušen}-bi ab-lal₃-ba

tum₁₂^{mušen}-bi-Ø ab-lal₃-bi-a

(wild) dove - III.SG.NHUM.POS- ABS/ hole (dove nest) -

III.SG.NHUM.POS- LOC

Its doves in their nests.

(1-1-5) Third Person Plural Human

N-POS

223) igi-ne-ne

igi-a-ne-ne

eye- III.PL.HUM.POS

Their eyes.

N-N-POS-GEN-LOC

169) bad₃ iri^{ki}-ne-ne-ka

[(bad₃ iri^{ki}-a-ne-ne)-ak]-]a

City, Wall-III.PL.NHUM.POS-GEN-LOC

Within the walls of their cities.

(1-1-6) Third Person Plural Human/ Non-Human

The Sumerian writer used the third person non-human pronoun (*-bi*) to indicate the plural⁽²⁾, and it is often the plural of Human as well as non-human pronoun. With this pronoun, he treated the plural as if they were a single non-human mass:

N-POS

126) silim-silim-bi

whole-whole-III.PL.NHUM.POS

all the salvation (of the lands).

159) a₂-bi

arm-III.PL.NHUM.POS

Their arms (the Gutians).

Note: Regarding separate pronouns, there is no mention of their use in the text of the "curse of Agade" , so they are not addressed in this study.

(1-2) Demonstrative Pronouns

A demonstrative pronoun is defined as a pronominal element that indicates a specific noun through either sensory or abstract reference⁽³⁾.

In grammatical structure, demonstrative pronouns belong to the class of pronouns and typically occur in post-position to possessive pronouns, when such pronouns are present. One of the major challenges encountered by scholars in the study of Sumerian grammar is the morphological and functional overlap between demonstrative pronouns and other elements, particularly possessive pronouns and case indicators. These complexities are further exacerbated by the likelihood of scribal inconsistencies in the transmitted Sumerian texts and by the presence of multiple dialectal variations within the Sumerian language⁽⁴⁾. The following is a presentation of the demonstrative pronouns used in the "Curse of Agade" text:

(1-2-1) bi: that, this

This pronoun is similar to the possessive pronoun of the third person non-human singular, and our only way to distinguish it is through the context:

N-DEM

253) ^{kuš}kuru₁₄-bi

strap – DEM

This leather straps.

N-DEM-LOC

270; 279) iri^{ki}-bi-a

city–DEM-LOC

On this city.

(1-2-2) ne⁽⁵⁾: this

This pronoun is similar to the personal plural suffix -(e)ne:

N-N-DEM-LOC

272) ^dutu u₄-ne-e-a

^dutu (u₄-ne)-a

Sun(*UTU*), Day–DEM-LOC

From the sun of this day.

(1-2-3) ur₅: this

This is an independent non-human pronoun, occurring especially use with phrases as ur₅-gin₇⁽⁶⁾:

180) ur₅- gin₇

DEM-EQT

like this, thus.

(1-3) Reflexive pronouns

We do not have enough information about reflexive pronouns. They are not accompanied by Ergative, and their rule is as follows⁽⁷⁾:

ni₂	Possessive pronoun	Case element
-----------------------	---------------------------	---------------------

The "curse of Agade" text contains one reflexive pronoun coupled with the non-human possessive pronoun (*-bi*), which is the reflexive pronoun: (*ni₂-bi-a*), as this pronoun refers to the third person, the singular, the non-human, and at the same time indicates the plural of the mass for the third person plural: (of his own accord, of their own accord), as follows:

183) u^g₃ ša₃-^gar-bi-ta ni₂-bi-a šu im-dub₂-dub₂-ne

u^g₃-e ša₃-^gar-bi-ta ni₂-bi-a-]Ø/ šu-Ø i-m(u)-b-dub₂-dub₂-ene

people–ERG/ hunger–III.PL.NHUM.POS-ABL/ RPRON-ABS/ CVN-ABS CJ-III.SG.NHUM.ABS- V: To flap- to flap –III.PL.HUM.ERG

Because of their hunger, the people drummed (with their fists) on their own (bodies).

45) ki-en-gi-ra niĝ₂-gur₁₁ ni₂-ba-ke₄⁽⁸⁾ ĝi^šma₂ im-da-gid₂-de₃
 ki-en-gir-ak niĝ₂-gur₁₁ ni₂-bi-a-ak-e/ ĝi^šma₂-Ø/ i₃-m(u)-da-(b)-gid₂-e
 Sumer –GEN / possession, RPRON–GEN-ERG/ CVN-ABS CJ-
 DI:COM-III.SG.NHUM.ABS-V: to tow a boat- III.SG.NHUM.ERG
 Sumer's own servants towed the ships (there).

(1-4) Interrogative pronouns

In contrast to personal pronouns, which operate on the subject pattern of their pronouns, we find that interrogative pronouns have referred to the pronoun (*b*) to indicate a human, while the pronoun (*n*) we find that it refers to a non-human⁽⁹⁾, as shown in the following table:

a-ba	who	Human
a-na	what	Non-human
a-gen ₇	how	Human

(1-4-1) a-ba: Who

93) lugal mu imin-am₃ šu saĝ-ĝa₂ du₁₁-ga a-ba igi im-mi-in-du₈-a
 lugal mu imin-am₃-Ø/ šu-Ø saĝ-a du₁₁.g-a]-Ø/ a-ba-(e)/ igi-Ø im-mi-
 n-du₈-Ø-a]-Ø

king, year, 7 - III.SG.COP ADJ:(CVN-ABS head –LOC V: to lay the
 hand head+NOM-)]Ø/ IPRON–ERG/ CVN-ABS CJ-
 III.SG.HUM.ERG- V: to see- III.SG.NHUM-ABS- NOM]-ABS

Who has ever seen a king lay his hands on his head for seven years?

The interrogative pronoun (*a-ba*) refers to the subject in a transitive sentence, or to a single nominal participant in an intransitive sentence, and never refers to the direct object⁽¹⁰⁾.

(1-4-2) a-na: What

151) a-na-am₃ im-gu-lu-a-ba
 a-na-am₃-Ø/ i-b-gu.l-e-a-bi-a
 IPRON–III.SG.COP-ABS/ CJ- III.SG.NHUM.ABS- V:to destroy–III.SG-
 HUM-ERG- NOM-DEM-LOC

Anything that he will destroy.

One of the case elements comes after interrogative pronouns, or one of copula, especially (*am*) which refers to an third person⁽¹¹⁾, and we see the literary style of ambiguity clearly in the use of Indefinite pronouns.

(1-4-3) a-gen₇: How

It is an interrogative pronoun that is rarely used, meaning: How, and it is clear that the equative case entered into its formulation⁽¹²⁾, and it seems that this leads us to the meaning: How is it like this:

54) ...a-gen₇ kuš₂ mi-ni-ib-ĝal₂

a-gen₇/ kuš₂-Ø/ mu-ni-b-ĝal₂-Ø

IPRON/ exhaust -ABS/ CJ- DI:LOC- OO- V: to exist - III.SG.NHUM.ABS

How did it happen? A sense of lethargy spread (across the gates of Agade).

(1-5) Indefinite pronoun

These pronouns appear morphologically similar to adjectives, as they are not followed by case elements. The indefinite pronouns refer to people or things⁽¹³⁾. According to what we have in the text, we find among these pronouns:

niĝ ₂ na-me	Something, anything,	Non-human
lu ₂ na-me	Some(one), any(one)	Human

(1-5-1) niĝ₂ na-me: Something

160) niĝ₂ na-me a₂-bi la-ba-ra-e₃

niĝ₂ na-me-Ø/ a₂-bi-ta/ nu-ba-ta-e₃-Ø

IND.PRON-ABS/ arm - III.SG.NHUM.POS-ABL/ NEG- CJ- DI:ABL- V:to go out - III.SG.NHUM.ABS

Nothing escaped their arms.

(1-5-2) lu₂ na-me: Some one

161) lu₂ na-me a₂-be₂ la-ba-an- da₁₃- da₁₃

lu₂ na-me-Ø/ a₂-bi-e/ nu-ba-n- da₁₃- da₁₃-e

IND.PRON-ABS/ arm - III.PL.NHUM.POS-ERG/ NEG- CJ- III.SG.HUM.ABS- V.RED: to be spared - III.SG.HUM.ERG

No one escape their arms

Conclusions:

The study focused on analyzing nominal pronouns in the Sumerian language through the text The "Curse of Agade", a historical text written in a literary style using the main Sumerian dialect (*IMI-GIR*) and the grammatical rules of the Old Babylonian period. It is worth noting that verbal pronouns in the Sumerian language were not addressed in this research.

Studying pronouns is of great importance in the Sumerian language due to their role in connecting sentence components and substituting for nouns and the entities they represent.

The pronouns examined in the study, based on the analyzed text, included: possessive pronouns, demonstratives, reflexive pronouns, and indefinite pronouns. The text "Curse of Agade" did not contain independent pronouns, and thus, they were not discussed.

In Sumerian, nominal pronouns occur within the noun phrase in a specific order: following the adjective and genitive marker (if present), and preceding the plural marker and case element. This structure was observed in the analyzed text.

The study relied on the text edition and line numbering provided by Cooper, and all line references in the research follow his numbering. Additionally, the Sumerian–French dictionary by Attinger was used to update the readings and meanings of the vocabulary. The study also utilized the reading and translation available on the ETCSL website, which is overseen by a group of specialized scholars.

abbreviations used in the glosses

Abbreviation	Meaning
I	First Person
II	Second Person
III	Third Person
ABL	Ablative
ABS	Absolute
ADJ	Adjective
CJ	Conjugation Prefix
CVN	Compound Verb Nominal Element
DEM	Demonstrative Pronoun
DIR	Directive ((motion+) arriving at place)
EQT	Equative
ERG	Ergative
GEN	Genitive
HUM	Human Gender (Including deities)
IPRON	Interrogative pronouns
IND.PRON	Indefinite pronoun
LOC	locative
N	Noun
NEG	Negator / Negative
NFV	Non-Finite Verb
NHUM	Non-Human Gender, including groups of people and slaves
NOM	Nominative Case
OO	Oblique Object
POS	Possessive
RPRON	Reflexive Pronoun
SG	Singular

TERM	Terminative (motion towards a place)
V	Verb Root

References:

- (1)Thomsen, M-L., 1984, The Sumerian Language: An Introduction to its History and Grammatical Structure. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag. Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 10. p.71; Michalowski, P., 2004, Sumerian, in R. Woodard (ed.), The Ancient Languages of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Aksum, Cambridge p.36.
- (2)Michalowski, P., 2004, p.36.
- (3) Al-Ghlayini, Mostafa, 1993, Collection of Arabic lessons, 8 Edition, Beirut, p. 127.
- (4)Jagersma, A.H., 2010, A descriptive grammar of Sumerian. Ph.D. diss., Universiteit Leiden. Jahn, B. (2005): Altbabylonische Wohnhäuser. Eine Gegenüberstellung philologischer und archäologischer Quellen (= Orient-Archäologie 16).p.219.
- (5)foxvog, D., 2016, Introduction to Sumerian Grammar , <http://cdli.ucla.edu/?q=cuneiform-digital-library-preprints> p.34.
- (6)foxvog, D., 2016, p. 35.
- (7)Michalowski, P., 2004, p.36.
- (8) Note that the line was read on the website (CDLI) as:
ki-en-gi-ra niĝ₂-gur₁₁ niĝ₂-ba-ta ĝišma₂ im-da-gid₂-de₃
- (9)Michalowski, P., 2004, p.35.
- 10-Huber, C., 1996, Some Notes on Transitivity, Verb Types, and Case with Pronouns in Sumerian, WZKM: 86, p.186.
- (11)Foxvog, D.A., 2016, p.35.
- (12)Jagersma, A.H., 2010, p.228.
- (13)oxvog, D.A., 2016, p.37; Jagersma, A.H., 2010, pp.331-2.

Bibliography of Arabic References:

- Al-Ghlayini, Mostafa, 1993, Collection of Arabic lessons, 8 Edition, Beirut.