

Copular clauses in Sumerian

I. Basic characteristics

a) enclitic copula

(1) En-metena 7 21-22 (Lagash, 25th c.)¹

ud-ba du-du, saŋŋa ^dnin-ŋir₂-su₂-ka-kam
 ud=be='a s[dudu=∅] pc[sanŋa ninŋirsuk=ak=∅]=am-∅
 day=DEM=L1 s[PN=ABS] pc[official DN=GEN=ABS]=COP-3.SG.S

“At that time Dudu was the temple administrator of the god Ningirsu.”

(2) En-ana-tum I 2 rev. 2:5 (Lagash, 24th c.)

an-ta-su-ra ŋa₂-kam
 s[antapura=∅] pc[ŋe=ak]=am-∅
 s[GN=ABS] pc[1.SG.PR=GEN]=COP-3.SG.S

“The Antapura is mine!”

(3) NG 214 obv. 1:8 (Umma, 21st c.)

inim ur-niŋin₃-ŋar nu-banda₃-ta-am₃
 pc[inim urniŋinŋar nubanda=ak=ta]=am-∅
 pc[word PN overseer=GEN=ABL]=COP-3.SG.S

“This was with the permission of Urningar, the overseer.”

b) independent copula

(4) Lugalbanda and the Anzud bird 106 (ETCSL 1.8.2.2) [*contains a prefix other than the finite-marker*]

dijir he₂-me-en
 pc[dijir=∅] s₁ha-s₂i-s₁₂me-s₁₄en
 pc[god=ABS] MOD-FIN-COP-2.SG.S

“if you are a god,”

¹ Abbreviations used in the morphemic glosses: ~ reduplication, ~PL = reduplication expressing verbal plurality; ~PF = reduplication expressing present-future tense; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; A = agent (subject of a transitive verb); ABL = ablative case-marker or prefix; ABS = absolutive case-marker; ADV = adverbial; ANT = prefix of anteriority; COM = comitative case-marker or prefix; COP = copula; CVN = compound verb nominal element; DAT = dative case-marker or prefix; DEM = demonstrative pronoun; DN = divine name; ERG = ergative case-marker; FIN = finite-marker prefix; GEN = genitive case-marker; GN = geographical name H = human; L1 = locative1 case-marker or prefix; L2 = locative2 case-marker or prefix; L3 = locative3 case-marker or prefix; MID = middle prefix; MOD = modal prefix; NEG = negative particle; NH = non-human; P = patient (object of a transitive verb); PC = predicate complement; PF = present-future, or the marker of the present-future; PL = plural; PR = pronoun; PN = personal name; POSS = possessive enclitic; PT = preterite, or the marker of the preterite; SG = singular; SUB = subordinator suffix; SYN = syncopated form of a verbal prefix; TL = tenseless; TERM = terminative case-marker or prefix; TN = temple name; VEN = ventive prefix.

In the graphemic transliteration subscript numerals distinguish homophonic graphemes; graphemes that constitute a word are linked by hyphens; in the morphemic segmentation and in the glosses the sign “=” links enclitics to their hosts. Three special characters are used in transliterating Sumerian: **ŋ** (pronounced as the last consonant in *sing*), **h** (pronounced as the last consonant in *loch*), and **š** (as the first consonant in *ship*).

ETCSL = Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>)

(5) NG 212 obv. 2:4 (Umma, 21st c.) [*subordinate, marked formally with the suffix -/’a/*]

arad^dšara₂ i₃-me-a
 PC[arad šara=ak=∅] s₂i⁻s₁₂me⁻s₁₄∅⁻s₁₅’a=ak
 PC[slave GN=GEN=ABS] FIN-COP-3.SG.S-SUB=GEN

“(Lugalazida is to take the assertory oath) that he (= Lugalitida) is a slave of the god Shara”.

II. Types of copular clauses in terms of their semantic type and information structure

(6) NG 32 3 (Lagaš, 21st c.) [*predicational, S functions as topic*]

arad ur-^dkuš-^dba-u₂-ka nu-u₃-me-en₃
 PC[arad urkušbauk=ak=∅] s₁nu⁻s₂i⁻s₁₂me⁻s₁₄en
 PC[slave PN=GEN=ABS] NEG-FIN-COP-1.SG.S

“I am not a slave of Ur-Kush-Bau”

(7) Ur-Namma 19 2:7-8 (Ur, 21st c.) [*predicational, PC’s possessor functions as topic*]

eg₂-ba a-ba-^dnanna-gin₇, mu-be₂
 PC’s POSS[eg=be=ak] s[aba=∅-nanna=gin=∅] PC[mu=be=∅]=am-∅
 PC’s POSS[levee=DEM=GEN] s[who=ABS-DN=EQU=ABS] PC[name=3.SG.NH.POSS=ABS]=COP-3.SG.S

“Of this levee ‘Who-is-like-the-god-Nanna?’ is its name.”

(8) Gudea Cyl. A 3:6 (Lagash, 22nd c.) (ETCSL 2.1.7) [*specificational, PC functions as topic, S as identificational focus*]

ama-ηu₁₀ ze₂-me
 PC[ama=ηu=∅] s[ze=∅]=me-en
 PC[mother=1.SG.POSS=ABS] s[2.SG.PR=ABS]=COP-2.SG.S

“My mother is you (and no one else).”

(9) Letter from X to the god Nanna 16 (ETCSL 3.3.22) [*specificational, PC’s possessor functions as topic, S as identificational focus*]

[an ki]-be₂-ta lugal-be₂ za-e-me-en
 PC’s POSS[an ki=beda=ak] PC[lugal=be=∅] s[ze=∅]-me-en
 PC’s POSS[sky earth=and=GEN] PC[king=3.SG.NH.POSS=ABS] s[2.SG.PR=ABS]=COP-2.SG.S

Akkadian: ša-me-e u₃ er-še-tam be-el-šu-nu at-ta-ma

“As for the universe, its lord is you.”

III. Attributive copular biclausal constructions (shared participant functions as the topic in the initial copular clause)

(10) Gudea Cyl. A 8:10 (Lagash, 22nd c.) (ETCSL 2.1.7)

li^{ηeš} u₂ sikil kur-ra-kam
 s[li=∅] PC[u sikil kur=ak=∅]=am=∅
 s[juniper=ABS] PC[plant pure mountain=ABS]=COP=3.SG.S

izi-a bi₂-si-si
 izi=’a s₅b⁻s₁₀i⁻s₁₁n⁻s₁₂si[~]si⁻s₁₄∅
 fire=L2.NH 3.SG.NH-L2-3.SG.H.A-fill~PL-3.SG.P

Lit. “The juniper is the pure plant of the mountains; he (= Gudea) put it onto the fire.”

= “He put juniper, (which is) the pure plant of the mountains, onto the fire.”

(11) NG 123 1-8 (Lagash, 21st c.)

ku-li-sag ₉ -ke ₄ ,	^m ama-šu-ḫal-bi	geme ₂	i ₃ -me-a,
kulisag=e	_s [amašuh _{al} bi=∅]	_{PC} [geme=∅]	_{S2} i _{-S12} me _{-S14} ∅ _{-S15} 'a
PN ₁ =ERG	_s [PN ₂ =ABS]	_{PC} [maiden=ABS]	FIN-COP-3.SG.S-SUB
na-ba-ra-sa ₁₀ -a,		i-ta-e ₃ -a,	nu-na-šum ₂ -ma,
_{S1} nu _{-S5} ba _{-S9} ta _{-S11} n _{-S12} sa _{-S14} ∅ _{-S15} 'a		itaea=ra	_{S1} nu _{-S6} nn _{-S7} a _{-S11} n _{-S12} šum _{-S14} ∅ _{-S15} 'a
NEG-MID-ABL-3.SG.H.A-buy-3SG.P-SUB		PN ₃ =DAT.H	NEG-3.SG.H-DAT-3.SG.H.A-give-3.SG.P-SUB
ba-da-ṛzah ₃ ¹ -a-kam,		e ₂	nin-ṛmar ^{ki} -ka,
_{S5} ba _{-S8} da _{-S12} zah _{-S14} ∅ _{-S15} 'a=ak=am=∅		e	ninmar=ak='a
MID-COM-disappear-3.SG.S-SUB=GEN=COP=3.SG.S		house	GN=GEN=L1
nam-erim ₂ -be ₂	in-kud		
namerim=be=∅	_{S2} i _{-S11} n _{-S12} kud _{-S14} ∅		
oath=3.SG.NH.POSS=ABS	FIN-3.SG.H.A-cut-3.SG.P		

“In the temple of Ninmar, Kuli-sag took the affirmatory oath that Ama-shuhalbi was a female slave, that he did not sell her, that he did not give her to Itaea, and that she indeed run away.”

(12) NATN 920 6-9 (Nippur, 21st c.)

lu ₂ -giri ₁₇ -zal,	lu ₂ -diḫir-ra	šeš	a-tu-me,
_s [lugirizal	ludiḫirak=∅]	_{PC} [šeš	atu=ak=∅]=me-eš
_s [PN ₁	PN ₂ =ABS]	_{PC} [brother	PN ₃ =GEN=ABS]=COP-3.PL.S
nu-u ₃ -ub-gi ₄ -gi ₄ -de ₃ -ša,			
_{S1} nu _{-S2} i _{-S5} b _{-S10} (i>)∅ _{-S12} gi _{-S13} ed _{-S14} eš _{-S15} 'a=ak			
NEG-FIN-3.SG.NH-L2.SYN-return~PF-PF-3.PL.S-SUB=GEN			

mu	lugal-be ₂	in-pad ₃
mu	lugal=ak=be=∅	_{S2} i _{-S11} n _{-S12} pad _{-S14} ∅
name	king=GEN=POSS.3.SG.NH=ABS	FIN-3.SG.H.A-call-3.SG.P

“He (= Atu) swore by the king’s name that Lu-girizal and Lu-digira, who are the brother of Atu, will not contest it (= Atu’s adoption of a slave as his heir) (lit. will not come back to it).”

It cannot mean: “He (= Atu) swore by the king’s name that Lu-girizal and Lu-digira are the brother of Atu, and that they will not contest (the adoption).”

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
HEAD	MODIFIER	POSSESSOR	PLURAL-MARKER	CASE-MARKER

Table 1: The Sumerian nominal template

(13) Gudea Cyl. A 7:11–12 (Lagash, 22nd. c.) (ETCSL 2.1.7)

inim	^d nanše-e	mu-na-dug ₄ -ga-aš,
_{P1} inim	_{P2} [nanše=e	_{S4} mu _{-S6} nn _{-S7} a _{-S11} n _{-S12} dug _{-S14} ∅ _{-S15} 'a]= _{P5} še
_{P1} word	_{P2} [DN=ERG	VEN-3.SG.H-DAT-3.SG.H.A-speak-3.SG.P-SUB]= _{P5} TERM
saḫ	sig	ba-ši-ḫar
saḫ	sig=∅=∅	_{S5} ba _{-S9} ši _{-S12} n _{-S13} ḫar _{-S14} ∅
head	low-TL=ABS	MID-TERM-3.SG.H.A-place-3.SG.P

Lit. “He set a low head to the words that Nanshe told him” = “He accepted what Nanshe told him.”

(14) NG 137 obv. 7 (Umma, 21st c.)

ab ₂	ša-bar-tur	mu-be ₂	i ₃ -me-a
_{P1} ab	_{P2} [šabartur=∅]	_{PC} [mu=be=∅]	_{S3} i _{-S12} me _{-S14} ∅ _{-S14} 'a]= _{P5} ∅
_{P1} COW	_{P2} [PN=ABS]	_{PC} [name=3.SG.NH.POSS=ABS]	FIN-COP-3.SG.S-SUB]= _{P5} ABS

“the cow whose name is Shabar-tur”

Sort of conclusion: The sentence “John, who is a sailor, built a house” may only be said in Sumerian as “John is a sailor; he built a house”. In constructions like exx. (10) and (12) above, the copular clause functions as paratactic, i.e., syntactically non-subordinate, copular relative clause; its predicate functions only to provide some additional information about about the shared participant.

(15) Ur-Namma 28 1:10-13 (Ur, 21st c.)

id ₂ -da,	^d nanna-gu ₂ -gal	mu-be ₂ ,
PC's POSS[id=ak]	s[nannagugal=∅]	PC[mu=be=∅]=am-∅
PC's POSS[canal=GEN]	s[GN=ABS]	PC[name=3.SG.NH.POSS=ABS]=COP-3.SG.S

id ₂	ki-sur-ra-kam,	mu-ba-al
PC[id	kisura=ak=∅]=am-∅]	s ₄ mu ^{-s₁₁} n ^{-s₁₂} bal ^{-s₁₄} ∅
PC[canal	border=GEN=ABS]=COP-3.SG.S]	VEN-3.SG.H.A-dig-3.SG.P

“A canal, whose name is Nanna-gugal, (and) which is a boundary canal, was dug by him (= Ur-Namma)”

IV. Specificational copular biclausal constructions (*shared participant functions as identificational focus in the initial copular clause*) (?)

(16) Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana 276 (ETCSL 1.8.2.4) (A)

za-e-me-en	en	ki	aṅ ₂	^d inana-me-en
s[ze=∅]-me-en	PC[en	ki=∅	aṅ-∅	inanak=ak=∅]-me-en
s[2.SG.PR=ABS]=COP-2.SG.S	PC[lord	place=ABS	measure-TL	DN=GEN=ABS]=COP-2.SG.S

Lit. “It is you. You are the lord beloved by the goddess Inana” = “It is you who is the lord beloved by the goddess Inana.”

MATRIX SUBJECT	COPULA	FOCUS PHRASE	RELATIVE CLAUSE
It	is	you	who is the lord beloved by the goddess Inana.
—	=me-en	ze=∅	en ki=∅ aṅ-∅ inanak=ak=∅-me-en
—	=COP-1.SG.S	2.SG.PR=ABS	lord place=ABS measure-TL DN=GEN=ABS=COP-2.SG.S

Table 2

(17) Hoe and Plough 147 (ETCSL 5.3.1) (A)

ṅe ₂₆ -e-me-en	mu ₂ -sar-ra	a	bi ₂ -ib ₂ -sig ₁₀ -sig ₁₀ -ge-en
s[ṅe=∅]=me-en	musar=’a	a=∅	s ₅ b ^{-s₁₀} i ^{-s₁₁} b ^{-s₁₂} sig~sig ^{-s₁₄} en
s[1.SG.PR=ABS]=COP-1.SG.S	plot=L2.NH	water=ABS	3.SG.NH-L2-3.SG.NH.P-put~PL-1.SG.A

“It is me who puts water in all the plots.”

(18) Gudea Cyl. A 13:2 (Lagash, 22nd c.) (ETCSL 2.1.7) (A)

siki	udu	gan-na-kam	šu-a	mi-ni-ṅar-ṅar
s[siki	udu	gan-∅=ak=∅]=am-∅]	šu=’a	s ₄ mu ^{-s₁₀} ni ^{-s₁₁} n ^{-s₁₂} ṅar~ṅar ^{-s₁₄} ∅
s[wool	sheep	bear-TL=GEN=ABS]=COP-3.SG.S	hand=L1	VEN-L1-3.SG.H.A-put~PL-3.SG.P

“(He undid the tongue of the goad and the whip); it was wool from lamb-bearing sheep that he placed instead in all hands”.

(19) NG 138 rev. 7 (Umma, 21st c.) (A)

udu-ṅu ₁₀ -um	šu ₂ -la-lum-ra	in-na-šum ₂
s[udu=ṅu=∅]=am=∅	šulum=ra	s ₂ i ^{-s₆} n ^{-s₇} a ^{-s₁₁} ’ ^{-s₁₂} šum ^{-s₁₄} ∅
s[sheep=1.SG.POSS=ABS]=COP-3.SG.S	PN=DAT.H	FIN-3.SG.H-DAT-1.SG.A-give-3.SG.P

“(Turam-ili declared:) ‘I gave MY sheep to Sulalum.’”

(20) HS 1512 obv. 9-10 (Nippur, OB period) (B)

dijir	an	ki-a	za-e-me-en	i ₃ -zalag-ge-en
dijir	an	ki=ak=∅	ze=∅=me-en	s ₂ i ⁻ _{s12} zalag ⁻ _{s14} en
god	sky	earth=GEN=ABS	2.SG.PR=ABS=COP-2.SG.S	FIN-shine-2.SG.A

Akkadian: *i₃-li ša AN u KI at-ta-ma tu-na-ma-ar*

“It is you who illuminates for the gods of heaven and earth.”

(21) NG 214 obv. 2:13 (Umma 21st c.) (AB)

ur-niṣar ^{nar}	nu-banda ₃ -am ₃	mu-da-an-kar
urniṣar	nubanda=∅=am-∅	s ₁ mu ⁻ _{s6} ’ ⁻ _{s8} da ⁻ _{s11} n ⁻ _{s12} kar ⁻ _{s14} ∅
PN	overseer=ABS=COP-3.SG.S	VEN-1.SG-COM-3.SG.H.A-flee-3.SG.P

“(Ur-Ninmuga stated:) ‘It was Ur-nigar, the overseer, who took it (= grain) away from me’.”

(22) Ur-Namma D, version of unknown provenance 2 (ETCSL 2.4.1.4)

id ₂	a-ba-a	mu-un-ba-al-e
id=∅	aba=e	s ₄ mu ⁻ _{s10} n ⁻ _{s12} bal ⁻ _{s14} e
canal=ABS	who=ERG	VEN-L1.SYN-dig-3.SG.A

“Who will dig there the canal?”

(23) Proverbs collection 2 + 6 Segment D 23 (ETCSL 6.1.02)

a-ba-am ₃	^{neš} ma ₂	bi ₂ -in-du ₈
aba=∅=am-∅	ma=e	s ₅ b ⁻ _{s10} i ⁻ _{s11} n ⁻ _{s12} du ⁻ _{s14} ∅
who=ABS=COP-3.SG.S	boat=L3.NH	3.SG.NH-L3-3.SG.H.A-caulk-3.SG.P

“Who caulked the boat?”

(24) Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the netherworld 36-37 (ms. UET 6/1 55)² (ETCSL 1.8.1.4) (B)

[munus-e]	ʾḡeš ¹	šu-na	ʾli ¹ -bi ₂ -in-gub,	
munus=e	ḡeš=∅	šu=ane=‘a	s ₁ nu ⁻ _{s5} b ⁻ _{s10} i ⁻ _{s11} n ⁻ _{s12} gub ⁻ _{s14} ∅	
woman=ERG	tree=ABS	hand=3.SG.H.POSS=L1	NEG-3.SG.NH-L2-3.SG.H.A-plant-3.SG.P	
ḡiri ₃ -ne ₂ -ta-am ₃		<<li->>bi ₂ -in-gub,		
ḡiri=ane=ta=am-∅		s ₅ b ⁻ _{s10} i ⁻ _{s11} n ⁻ _{s12} gub ⁻ _{s14} ∅		
foot=3.SG.H.POSS=ABL=COP-3.SG.S		3.SG.NH-L2-3.SG.H.A-plant-3.SG.P		
[munus-e]	ʾḡeš ¹	šu-na	a	ʾli ¹ -bi ₂ -in-dug ₄ ,
munus=e	ḡeš=∅	šu=ane=‘a	a=∅	s ₁ nu ⁻ _{s5} b ⁻ _{s10} i ⁻ _{s11} n ⁻ _{s12} dug ⁻ _{s14} ∅
woman=ERG	tree=ABS	hand=3.SG.H.POSS=L1	water=ABS	NEG-3.SG.NH-L2-3.SG.H.A-do-3.SG.P
ḡiri ₃ -ne ₂ -ta-am ₃		bi ₂ -in-dug ₄		
ḡiri=ane=ta=am-∅		s ₅ b ⁻ _{s10} i ⁻ _{s11} n ⁻ _{s12} dug ⁻ _{s14} ∅		
foot=3.SG.H.POSS=ABL=COP-3.SG.S		3.SG.NH-L2-3.SG.H.A-do-3.SG.P		

“The woman did not plant the tree with her hands; she planted with her FEET. The woman did not water the tree with her hands; she watered it with her FEET.”

(25) NG 99 11 (Lagash, 21st c.) (B)

e ₂	kug	šu-na-ta-am ₃	in-sa ₁₀ -a
e=∅	kug	šu=ane=ak=ta=am-∅	s ₂ i ⁻ _{s11} n ⁻ _{s12} sa ⁻ _{s14} ∅ ⁻ _{s15} ’a[=∅]
house=ABS	silver	hand=3.SG.H.POSS=GEN=ABL=COP-3.SG.S	FIN-3.SG.H.A-buy-3.SG.P-SUB[=ABS]

“(Inasaga took an assertory oath) she had bought the house with the silver of HER OWN HAND.”

² The other mss. that contain these lines do not use the copula.

(26) NG 210 4:4-6 (Lagash, 21st c.) (B)

dug₄-ga-^dba-u₂-še₃, ur-^dršul¹-udul₅-ke₄, kug ni₂-GA-ne₂-em
 dugabauk=še uršuludulak=e s[kug=∅] PC[ninga=ane=∅]=am-∅
 PN=TERM PN=ERG s[silver=ABS] PC[property=3.SG.H.POSS=ABS]=COP-3.SG.S

in-ši-in-la₂-as₂i⁻s₆n⁻s₉ši⁻s₁₁n⁻s₁₂la⁻s₁₄∅⁻s₁₄'a[=ak]

FIN-3.SG.H-TERM-3.SG.H.A-weigh-3.SG.P-SUB[=GEN]

“(Ur-Shuludul is to swear) that Ur-Shuludul paid for Duga-Bau with silver that is HIS OWN property.”

(27) NG 167 10-11 (Lagash, 21st c.) (B)

ur-ba-u₂-ke₄ ur-[...] nam-^rmussa¹-[še₃]

urbauk=e ur[...]=∅ nammussa=še

PN₁=ERG PN₂=ABS son.in.law=TERMr¹ni₂¹-u₂-rum-ra-am₃ in-[na-šum₂-ma]nigurum=ra=am-∅ s₂i⁻s₆nn⁻s₇a⁻s₁₁n⁻s₁₂šum⁻s₁₄∅⁻s₁₅'a=∅PN₃=DAT.H=COP-3.SG.S FIN-3.SGH.-DAT-3.SG.H.A-give-3.SG.P-SUB=ABS

“(Ur-Bau swore that) he has given Ur-... as son-in-law to NIGURUM.”

(28) Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta 200-202 (ETCSL 1.8.2.3) (A)

ḡa₂-a-še₃-am₃ ... kur me sikil-la-ke₄

ḡa=še=am-∅ kur me sikil-∅=ak=e

1SG.PR=TERM=COP-3.SG.S mountain power pure-TL=GEN=L3.NH

ḡa-ma-du₃-es₁ḡa⁻s₄m⁻s₇a⁻s₁₂du⁻s₁₄e

MOD-VEN-DAT-build-3.SG.A

“It is for me, ..., that he (= lord of Aratta) should make the mountain of the pure divine powers (= Aratta) build it (= the temple of Inana).”

References

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