

## Verbal reduplication, verbal plurality and aspect in Sumerian

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Sumerian was the first written language in Mesopotamia (today's south Iraq), preserved in cuneiform writing from the last third of the 4th millennium B. C. for about one and a half thousand years, even after it died out around 2 000 B.C. Sumerian is an agglutinative language with morphologically complex verbal forms. The corpus of Sumerian texts includes administrative, legal, literary texts, and royal inscriptions. Grammatically (and especially morphologically) analyzable texts come after roughly the second half of the 3rd millenium B. C.

Besides a relatively complex system of nominal plurality (enclitics, nominal reduplication, reduplication of 'adjectives') verbal plurality occurs in the Sumerian verb. It is expressed either by stem alternation (which always marks participant plurality) or by the full reduplication of the verbal base. The exact nature of this latter marker is debated: does it refer to event plurality only, or does it also mark participant plurality? What subtypes of event plurality does it cover (iterativity, frequentativity etc.)? There is no consensual answer to these questions in the literature, and particularly no attempt has yet been made to answer them utilizing the accomplishments of current linguistic theory, and the classifications of usages of full reduplication usually mirror the impressions of the sumerologists reading the texts. Since event number can be described as a subgroup of verbal aspect (cf. Corbett 2000: 246-247) I will handle it as such, and will attempt to answer the above questions applying our knowledge of aspect according to (diachronic) typology.

My starting point is the grammaticalization of aspect, as worked out in Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994). Though the earlier usage of full reduplication in Sumerian can only be observed by non-direct means (especially in lexicalized verbal forms with full reduplication of the verbal base), it can be assumed that the full verbal reduplication went through the way of grammaticalization described by Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca resulting in the linguistic situation we see in our written Sumerian texts. I will show how the different usages of full verbal reduplication can be placed on the chain of grammaticalization establishing a typologically reinforced pattern of aspect values in Sumerian. Lexical aspect (Boogaart and Janssen 2007: 813) is also incorporated into the classification since verbal semantics plays an important role in the distribution of verbal aspect. I will also show the role registers play in determining the frequency of plural forms in different sub-corpora.

The chain of grammaticalization also provides a possible explanation to another reduplicative phenomenon in Sumerian, the so-called marû-reduplication. The present-future tense of certain Sumerian verbs is marked with partial or (in the case of CV bases) the full reduplication of the verbal base. I argue that these may be more grammaticalized forms developed from the fully reduplicated verbs marked for verbal number.

### Bibliography:

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