THE SUMERIAN EQUATIVE CASE: A STUDY OF ITS CONSTRUCTIONS[*]

Szilvia Sövegjártó

Friedrich Schiller University, Jena

ABSTRACT

The Sumerian equative morpheme is widely accepted as an adnominal case marker because it only occurs on the noun phrase without a corresponding verbal affix on the finite verb. In some cases, however, the equative obviously indicates a semantic relation with the verb and not with another noun phrase. Moreover, there are sporadic examples where two non-appositional noun phrases are marked with the equative morpheme which contradicts its function as a case-marker.

In this paper I compare the syntax of the equative and the genitive case marker as well as the adverbial marker /eš/. I argue that the syntactical position of the noun phrase marked with the equative differs from that of a noun phrase marked with the genitive case, the other adnominal case in Sumerian. It is, however, similar to that of the adverbial marker /eš/. My aim is to prove that the equative morpheme is actually not a case marker but an adverbial marker of sentence adverbials.

RESUME

Le morphème du équatif sumérien est largement accepté comme un marqueur de dépendance adnominale, car il ne se produit que sur la phrase nominale, sans un affixe correspondant verbal sur le verbe fini. Cependant, on observe des situations où l'équatif indique évidemment une relation sémantique avec le verbe et non avec une autre phrase nominale. Par ailleurs, il y a des exemples sporadiques, où deux phrases nominales, qui ne sont pas en apposition, sont marquées par le morphème équatif, ce qui contredit sa fonction comme un cas.

Dans cet article, je compare la syntaxe de l'équatif et le génitif autant que l'adverbiatif /eš/. À mon avis, la position syntaxique du syntagme nominal marqué par l'équatif diffère de celle du syntagme nominal marqué par le génitif, l'autre cas adnominal en sumérien. Cependant, il est similaire à celle de l'adverbiatif /eš/. Mon but est de prouver que le morphème équatif n'est pas un marqueur de cas, mais un marqueur adverbial des compléments circonstanciels.

The status of the equative case marker does not belong to the much debated topics of the Sumerian grammar. It is usually regarded as one of the adnominal cases together with the genitive case because of the lack of a verbal affix co-referential with the noun phrase in the equative case.[1] It is accordingly undoubted that the equative case marks primarily a noun phrase used in comparison with another noun phrase. There are, however, some reasons to doubt that this definition holds true in every case.

First, the function of the Sumerian equative case has to be defined on the basis of the linguistic terminology.[2] The so-called "equative construction" should express by definition equality, more specifically equal extent. In case of Sumerian, the equative case appears with such a meaning with stative verbs as example (1) illustrates.[3]

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[1] So Foxvog (2008: 39): "The genitive and equative cases indicate relationships between one noun (or pronoun) and another and so may be described as adnominal in function. The remaining cases are adverbial in function, serving to indicate relationships between nouns and verbs. Since they only relate substantives, the genitive and equative cases are marked only by nominal postpositions. The adverbial cases, which mark verbal subjects, agents, and objects, and convey locational or directional ideas, are, by contrast, marked not only by nominal postpositions, but often also by corresponding affixes in verbal forms." The same thesis is to be found recently in Jagersma (2010: 203): "The equative case primarily expresses a relation of comparison between two noun phrases. Thus, like the genitive case, it does not indicate a semantic relation with the verb. This is undoubtedly the reason why finite verbal forms never contain an affix which is coreferential with a noun phrase in the equative or genitive case. All other cases designate some semantic relation with the verb and have their counterparts in some verbal affix."

[2] On the difference between equative and similative constructions see Haspelmath and Buchholz (1998: 313): "Semantically, the difference between equatives and similatives is not so much that similatives express approximate similarity, while equatives express true equality, but rather that similatives express identity of manner, while equatives express identity of degree or extent, or in other words, similatives express quality while equatives express quantity".

[3] For some further examples see Jagersma (2010: 204-205). This construction is, however, very rare in Sumerian.

(1) Proper name in DP 112 v 6; 24th c. BCE (Allotte de la Fuÿe 1909)

^{d}Ba-u$_2$-gen$_7$	-a-ba	-sag$_9$
Bau=gen	aba=∅	sag-∅
DN=EQU	who=ABS	beautiful-NFIN

"Who is as good as Bau?"

The more typical construction expressed by the Sumerian equative case is the "similative construction". Similative constructions express likeliness or equality of manner, that is, the equivalence is of qualitative nature as examples (2) and (3) indicate.

(2) Gudea Cyl. A xxiv 10; 22nd c. BCE (Edzard 1997)

ud-sakar	gibil-gen$_7$	men	bi$_2$-il$_2$
udsakar	gibil=gen	men=∅	b-i-n-il-∅
crescent moon	new=EQU	tiara=ABS	3NH-LOC3-3H.A-raise.PT-3SG.P

"He (Gudea) had it (the temple) wear a tiara like the new moon."

(3) Gudea Cyl. A xxvii 6-7; 22nd c. BCE

E$_2$-ninnu	ni$_2$-bi	kur-kur-ra
Eninnu=ak	ni=bi=∅	kur~kur='a
TN=GEN	fear=3NH.POSS=ABS	mountain~PL=LOC2

tug$_2$-gen$_7$	im-dul$_4$
tug=gen	i-m-b-(i)-dul-∅
cloth=EQU	FIN-VEN-3NH-LOC2-cover.PT-3SG.S

"The fearsomeness of the E-ninnu covers all the lands like a garment."

The distinction between the two constructions has to be formalized on the basis of the linguistic terminology.[4] There are languages where equative and similative constructions have different structures. As English

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[4] For the terminology applied here see Haspelmath and Buchholz (1998: 279).

belongs to those languages, in the following table the equative and the similative constructions in English are compared:

COMPAREE		PARAMETER MARKER	PARAMETER	STANDARD MARKER	STANDARD
She	sings	as	beautifully	as	a nightingale.
She	sings			like	a nightingale.

Table 1 – The equative and the similative constructions in English.

There is a maximum of three lexical items involved in equative or similative constructions: the comparee, the parameter and the standard. Moreover, there may be one or two functional elements in the construction, the parameter marker and the standard marker.

STANDARD	STANDARD MARKER	COMPAREE	
^{d}Ba-u$_2$	-gen$_7$	a-ba	sag$_9$
ud-sakar gibil	-gen$_7$	men	bi$_2$-il$_2$

Table 2 – The equative and the similative constructions in Sumerian.

In the case of the Sumerian equative and similative constructions, as the table above shows, there is no parameter marker but a standard marker. Furthermore, the parameter —in other languages usually an adjective— is missing in the equative construction because it is part of the verbal head. On the basis of syntactical and semantical criteria the Sumerian "equative case" should be rather called "similative case".

It is, moreover, questionable if this construction encodes the relationship of two noun phrases. First of all, semantical reasons imply that the equative or similative case is not always an adnominal case but the noun phrase marked with it has a close relationship to the verb. The following table lists a number of examples from the Gudea Cylinders A and B where the comparee is the same noun: e$_2$ 'house'.

	COMPAREE	STANDARD	VERB
Cyl. A xxi 19	e$_2$ 'house'	ḫursaĝ 'mountain'	mu$_2$ 'grow high'
Cyl. B xxiv 9		kur gal 'great mountain'	us$_2$ 'reach (to the sky)'

	COMPAREE	STANDARD	VERB
Cyl. A xxi 21		gud 'bull'	si – il$_2$ 'raise the horn'
Cyl. A xxiv 14		^{d}utu 'sun'	e$_3$ 'come out'

Table 3 – Elements of similative constructions from the Gudea Cylinders A and B.

On the basis of these examples it is plausible that the standard of comparison is determined by the verb and not by the comparee, with other words, the head of the construction where the equative noun phrase belongs is the verb and not the other noun phrase. Therefore an adverbial use of the noun phrase marked with the equative case seems here obvious.

As the Sumerian equative is usually regarded as one of the two Sumerian adnominal cases, it is worth comparing it with the other adnominal case, the genitive. The common feature designated to both cases is that they are marked only on the noun phrase without a corresponding element in the verbal prefix chain. The structure of the genitive and the equative construction, however, differs significantly.

(4) Gudea St. B ii 1-3; 22nd c. BCE (Edzard 1997)
[P1 P3[P1-P5$_{GEN}$]-P5$_α$]

^{d}Nin-ğir-su   ur-sağ   kal-ga ^{d}En-lil$_2$-la$_2$-ra

Ninğirsu   ursağ   kalag   Enlil=ak=ra

DN   warrior   strong   DN=GEN=DAT

"For Ninğirsu, the strong warrior of Enlil (...)"

As example (4) shows, in the genitive construction the enclitic case marker of the head noun (P5$_α$) is attached to the phrase after the genitive case marker. That is, when the head noun is followed by a modifying genitive construction, its case marker cannot be directly linked to the lexical head. Just like other modifiers of the head noun, also the genitive modifier has to be placed between the head noun and its enclitic case marker.

(5) Lugalzagesi 1 ii 31-32; 24th c. BCE (Frayne 2008)
[P1-(P3)-P5$_α$] [P1-(P3)-P5$_{EQU}$]

urim$_2$^{ki}-e   gud-gen$_7$ sağ

GN=e   gud=gen   sag=∅

Ur=ERG   bull=EQU   head=ABS

an-še$_3$ mu-dab$_6$-il$_2$

an=še   mu-n-da-b-il-$\varnothing$

sky=TERM   VEN-3H-COM-3NH.A-rise.PT-3SG.P

"Ur raised his head to the sky like a bull."

The construction involving a noun phrase in the equative case is different, as example (5) demonstrates. Here the case marker of the head noun (P5$_\alpha$) has to precede the noun phrase marked with the equative case. In this type of construction the noun phrase marked with the equative case always constitutes a separate noun phrase.

The structural sketch aims to summarize and illustrate the difference between the two constructions. There is, however, no feasible reason why two adnominal cases should appear in such distinct constructions. Furthermore, the genitive noun phrase is similarly located as the other modifiers of the head noun. The equative construction, however, appears to diverge.

Another possibility is to regard the Sumerian similative or equative construction as manner adverbial. The interpretation of similative constructions as manner adverbials is straightforward cross-linguistically. In addition to the similative construction there is another common means of expressing manner adverbials in Sumerian, namely the so-called adverbiative marker -eš (Jagersma 2010: 84).

(6) Gudea Cyl. A xxiv 8; 22nd c. BCE

e$_2$	lugal-na	zid-de$_3$-eš$_2$	mu-du$_3$
e	lugal=ani=ak=$\varnothing$	zid=eš	mu-n-du-$\varnothing$
house	master=3H.POSS=GEN=ABS	right=ADV	VEN-3H.A-built.PT-3SG.P

"He built the house of his master appropriately."

The status of the adverbiative marker in the Sumerian grammar is not yet set. It is, however, worth to mention that the resemblance to the equative marker is not merely semantical. The noun phrase marked with the adverbiative also constitutes a separate noun phrase from the head noun and it does not have a co-referential element in the verbal prefix chain. The

reason for this behaviour of the equative and the adverbiative is hard to discuss while the constitution of the Sumerian verbal prefix chain remains unsolved. It is, however, a possibility that both cases mark so-called sentence adverbials. That is, these elements are no verbal arguments but adjuncts, and for this reason they do not have such a close relationship to the verb as that of the verbal arguments forming part of the verbal prefix chain.[5]

Another problematic construction of the equative is known from Early Dynastic evidence. There are some examples for a construction where in a nominal clause both noun phrases involved in a comparison are marked with the equative case. The first known example for this so-called "archaic construction" stems from an Early Dynastic proverb and it had been preserved in archaic personal names up to the Ur III period (Jagersma 2010: 205) as it is stated by examples (7) and (8). This structure changed in later periods and the second equative morpheme was dropped from the noun phrase, maybe under Akkadian influence (Krebernik 1998: 260).

(7) Early Dynastic Proverbs l. 3; 26th c. BCE (Alster 1991-1992)

ka-zu-gen₇	gala₄-zu-gen₇
ka=zu=gen	gala=zu=gen
mouth=2H.POSS=EQU	vulva=2H.POSS=EQU

"As is your mouth, so is your vulva."

(8) Proper name in STA 4 iii 23; 21st c. BCE (Chiera 1922)

Nin-gen₇	-a-ba-gen₇
nin=gen	aba=gen
lady=EQU	who=EQU

"Who is like the lady?"

If we consider the archaic construction a productive construction of the equative, it would indicate that two non-appositional noun phrases could be marked with the equative morpheme that contradicts its function as a case-marker, at least in the Early Dynastic period. It is, however, not the only possibility. According to these examples it seems sure that this archaic construction was not common in Early Dynastic texts: both examples have had specific uses being a proverb and a personal name.

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[5] The distribution of the adverbiative and the equative is also a problematic question. A preliminary observation is that the adverbiative occurs most frequently with adjectives and the equative with nouns. A more precise research would be, however, desirable.

It is important to mention that the "archaic construction" was not the only option to build a nominal similative construction in the Early Dynastic period: the simple nominal construction could also be applied with the same meaning as example (9) indicates. Furthermore, the similative construction with adverbial use is also attested in this period according to examples (10) and (11). In all these sentence types the second equative case marker is missing.

(9) AAICAB I/1 pl. 38 Ashm. 1911-229 1:18; 21st c. BCE (Grégoire 1996)

A-ba	-nin	-gen$_7$
aba	nin	-gen
who	lady	-EQU

"Who is like the lady?"

(10) Za$_3$-mi$_2$ hymns ll. 27-28; 26th c. BCE (Biggs 1974)

Kul-aba	an-gen$_7$	šu	nu-ti
Kulaba='a	an=gen	šu=∅	nu-ti-∅
GN=LOC2	sky=EQU	hand=ABS	NEG-approach-NFIN

"Like the sky, Kulaba cannot be opposed."

(11) ARET 5, 24 ll. 1-3; 25th c. BCE (Krebernik 1997)

lugal	an-ki	nu-dub$_2$$^!$	ki-gen$_7$	nu-siki
lugal=∅	an=gen	nu-dub-∅	ki=gen	nu-siki-∅
king=ABS	sky=EQU	NEG-tremble-NFIN	earth=EQU	NEG-scatter-NFIN

"Lord (who) cannot be shaken like the sky, (who) cannot be scattered like the earth."

The question is, if this double-equative construction is an archaic remain which is not productive any more in the Early Dynastic period, or if it is a still productive but poorly attested construction at this time. Both examples for the "archaic construction" have a remarkable feature in common: namely, in both cases we lack the head of the comparison which should be expressed by a verb or a copula. Here two noun phrases are compared with each other. This is, however, a special type of sentence called balanced sentence. The difference between a nominal sentence and the more specific balanced sentence —which is not necessarily nominal— could be described as follows:

NOMINAL SENTENCE:	A (is) B	Early Dynastic Proverbs l. 35; 26th c. BCE šag$_4$-gal ašag "Food supply (is) a field."
BALANCED SENTENCE:	A (is) A'	Early Dynastic Proverbs l. 28; 26th c. BCE šag$_4$ min bar min "Two hearts (are) two minds."

While the nominal sentence has the structure "A is B", the balanced sentence has a structure "A is A'", the first component of the sentence being in both cases the subject and the second component being the predicate. Moreover, in the case of a balanced sentence both components are topicalized, which is not the case in a nominal sentence. Let us see some more examples for the balanced sentence from the same Early Dynastic proverb collection.

(12) Early Dynastic Proverbs l. 62; 26th c. BCE

gud u$_2$ gud giš kešda

gud u=$\varnothing$ gud giš=$\varnothing$ kešda-$\varnothing$

ox grass=ABS   ox wood=ABS bound-NFIN

"An ox of grass (is) an ox bound to the yoke."

(13) Early Dynastic Proverbs ll. 102-103; 26th c. BCE

munus tibir$_2$ nu-tuku   munus addir nu-tuku

munus tibir=$\varnothing$ nu-tuku-$\varnothing$ munus addir=$\varnothing$ nu-tuku-$\varnothing$

woman fist=ABS NEG-have-NFIN   woman wages=ABS NEG-have-NFIN

"A woman without fists (is) a woman without wages."

As these examples indicate, the use of the balanced sentence was not limited to express similarity but it was common, for example in proverbs where the content was truncated or abbreviated. It is possible that an early construction to express the similarity of two noun phrases was developed in form of the balanced sentence in Sumerian but it was not necessarily the case. What is sure, however, is that in this sentence type the equative case marker should be regarded as the head of the construction because it is the repeating element. The question is how the equative construction emerged

and functioned. There are two possibilities to solve this question: assuming the word written with the sign DIM$_2$ or GEN$_7$, from which the equative morpheme emerged, was originally of nominal or of verbal nature.

If we suppose that it was a noun then the lexical noun completed with GEN$_7$ should function as a composite noun where GEN$_7$ means 'sort', 'kind'. The translation would be then "A-sort is B-sort". There is, however, a problem with this solution: Sumerian composita function generally in another way.

In Sumerian composite nouns one of the two nouns has an adjectival meaning. This noun is, however, always the second part of the compositum. That is the case for example in the composita an-šag$_4$ 'inner heaven' and an-dul$_3$ 'dark heaven', among others. Consequently in our case, assuming that GEN$_7$ was the head of the compositum with nominal meaning modified by another noun, it should be the first part of the compositum and not the second.

The other possibility is that GEN$_7$ was once a verb semantically related to DIM$_2$ 'to make, to create'.[6] In this case, the noun before GEN$_7$ could easily be the subject or the object of a non-finite verb of the LAL-type. This solution is better with regard to the structure of the phrase. So the meaning of the balanced sentence would be "As your mouth is acting is as your vulva is acting", the nouns being the subject of the non-finite verb. In case of sentences with an adverbial similative construction this schema can also be applied: "Ur raised his head to the sky making / representing a bull", where the noun preceding GEN$_7$ would be its object. The derivation from this meaning to the similative one seems obvious.

The verbal origin of the equative case marker is also supported by the fact that the equative noun phrase refers mostly to the subject of the verb or to a topicalized element in the sentence.[7] Furthermore, such an innovation is not unique cross-linguistically —here it is enough to mention the direct object marker in Chinese which emerged from the verb 'to take'. Moreover, this phenomenon is not unique in case of the Sumerian language —most probably the dative marker -/ra/ is also of verbal origin emerging from the verb /rah/ 'to beat'.

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[6] As there is no phonetic similarity of the two forms, a semantic relation should explain the more or less consequent use of the same sign.
[7] So Jagersma (2010: 203): "Mostly, the compared item is the subject or the object." The only sure exception known for me stems from an Old Babylonian literary text cited by Jagersma (2010: 204) (333). In case of participant-oriented adjuncts such a restriction is well-attested (Himmelmann and Schultze-Berndt 2005: 1).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

2H	second person, human
3H	third person, human
3NH	third person, non-human
3SG	third person, singular
A	agent
ABS	absolutive case marker
ADV	adverbiative marker
COM	comitative case marker
DAT	dative case marker
DN	divine name
EQU	equative marker
ERG	ergative case marker
FIN	finite marker prefix
GEN	genitive case marker
LOC2	locative case marker (locative-terminative)
LOC3	locative case marker (directive)
NEG	negation
NFIN	non-finite marker
P	patient
PL	plural marker
POSS	possessive pronoun
PT	past tense
S	subject
TERM	terminative case marker
VEN	ventive

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