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Mapping the Sumerian mind

Conceptual metaphor patterns in Sumerian language

Erika Marsal

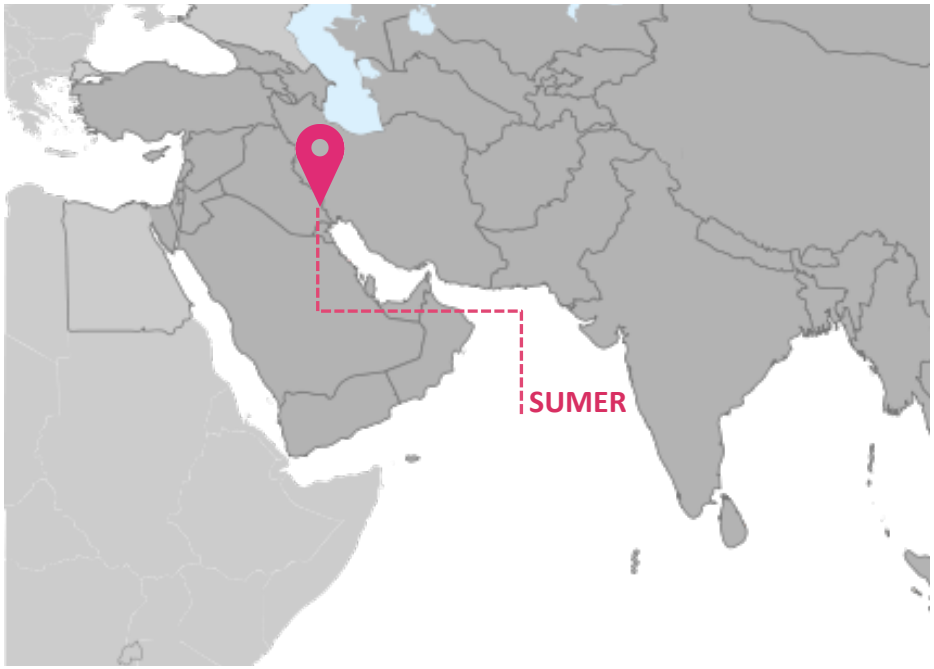
1. Introduction

Some facts about Sumerian language

- **TIME and LOCATION**
  Southern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) from ca. **3000 BCE** to ca. **1800 BCE**.

- **SCRIPT**
  Written in **cuneiform** script.

- **LANGUAGE**
  Agglutinative and **split-ergative**.
  Language isolate.



- It is **probably the most ancient known** written language.

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Modern approaches to Sumerian language (an overview)

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"Sumerian Language: An introduction to its history and Grammatical Structure" (1984)

"the big bang"

Most grammars and monographs on Sumerian language appeared. The works of **D. Foxvog M. Civil, F. Karahashi** or **D. O. Edzard** are some examples.

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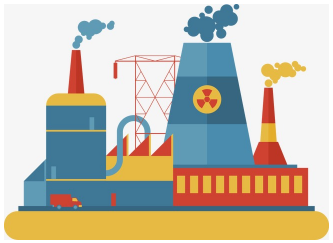

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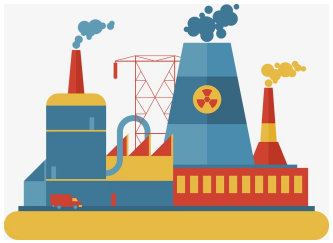

So far, no analysis based on cognitive linguistics has been done!

2. The corpus

- **The royal inscriptions and hymns of Isin and Larsa.** (ca. 1961–1674 BCE)

- Two sources of texts: **The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL)***:* 93 hymns from the Isin dynasty and 14 hymns from the Larsa dynasty) and **ePSD2 Royal inscriptions** (90 inscriptions from the Isin dynasty and 170 from the Larsa dynasty).

3. Conceptual metaphors

- Started by Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors we live by* (1980).
- Later developments stress the idea that the experiential basis of conceptual metaphors should be reconceived as **deeply shaped** by **interpersonal and cultural dynamics** (Langacker 1999, Kristiansen & Dirven 2008, etc.).
- A conceptual metaphor is one that identifies a **pattern of thought** from a number of actual instances of metaphor. This schema takes the form **TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN.**
- We use the term 'source domain' to refer to the **literal meaning;** the **metaphoric sense** that differs from the common or basic sense is known as the 'target domain.'

TIME IS MONEY!

IDEAS ARE LIGHT BULBS

4. Conceptual metaphor patterns in Sumerian language

GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN

Source domain: up, down

Target domain: good, goodness, bad, badness

Cross-culturally widespread.

il_2-la

"(to be) elevated" (ePSD)

^{d}en-lil$_2$-ba-ni (....) ^{d}en-lil$_2$-le il$_2$-la
" [The ruler] Enlil-bāni (...), elevated by (the god) Enlil."
Enlil-bāni A (ETCSL c.2.5.8, 5)

igi il_2

(from **igi** "eye" and **il_2** "to rise") "to rise the eye", "to look over", "to select" (Dicks 2012: 81).

dam igi il$_2$-la ^{d}inana
"Spouse chosen by the goddess Inana."
Inscription to Ur-Ninurta
(Frayne 1990: E.4.1.6.1: 12–13)

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sukud

“height”, “high part (of a building, of a person)” (ePSD).

ḫur-saŋ-gin$_7$ bi$_2$-in-sukud

saŋ an-e ši-⌜bi⌝-in-us$_2$

“He made it (=te temple) high like a mountain and made its head touch heaven.”

Inscription to Warad-Sîn

(Frayne 1990: E.4.2.13.6: 21–22)

šub

"to fall", "to drop", "lay (down)", "to thresh (grain)" (ePSD).

uŋ$_3$-un-be$_2$
⌜ŋiš tukul⌝ ḫe$_2$-en-da-šub-be$_2$
uru-ne$_2$ e$_2$-ri-a ⌜ar$_2$?-ar$_2$?⌝ ḫe$_2$-im
kalam-ma-ne$_2$ ḫe$_2$-en-šu$_2$
uŋ$_3$-un-be$_2$

"May it fell its people with weapons. May his city become a ruin... May his land tumble down."

Inscription to Sîn-iqišam

(Frayne 1990: E.4.2.11.1, ii 2'–6')

THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS

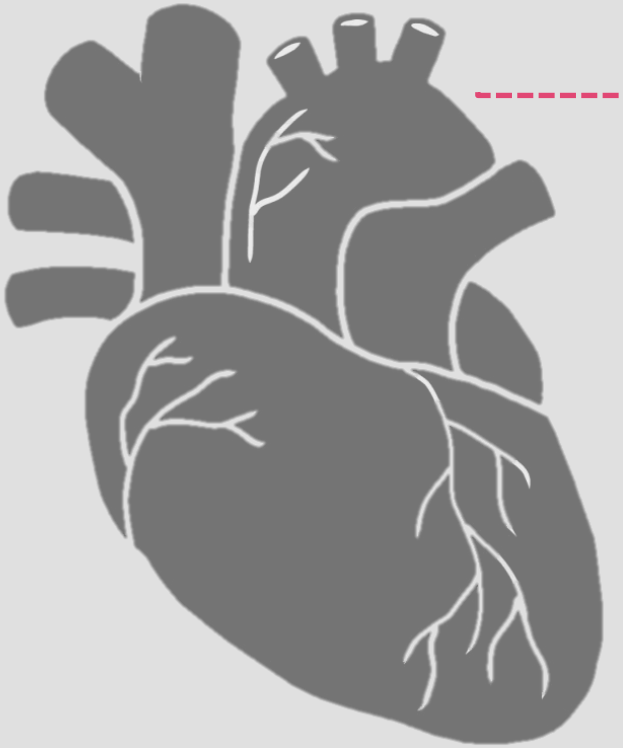
Source domain: entities, substances, body parts

Target domain: emotions

Cross-culturally widespread, BUT its use in Sumerian **reflects cultural conceptualizations** (Kövecses 2000, Sharifian 2003, 2011) associated with the L1 of the scribes (e.g. THE EYE IS THE SITE OF ENVY, THE HEART IS THE SITE OF COMPASSION…).

In Sumerian, **body parts** are often used to indicate **orientational metaphors**. E. g. **$\check{s}a_3$** "heart", "inside"; **ab $\check{s}a_3$** = "center of the sea"; **saŋ** = "head", "roof"; **bar** "behind", "outside", etc.

THE HEART IS A CONTAINER FOR POSITIVE EMOTIONS



- **$\check{s}a_3$.g**
  "heart", "inner body", "in", "inside", "womb" (ePSD)

  nun $\check{s}a_3$ ki aη_2
  ^{d}nin-isin^{si-}na
  "Prince beloved heart of the goddess Nininsina."
  Inscription to Damiq-ilīšu
  (Frayne 1990: E.4.1.15.2: 8–9)

- **$\check{s}a_3$ ḫul$_2$**
  "to be happy", "happy heart" (ePSD)

  niη_2 $\check{s}a_3$ ḫul$_2$-ḫul$_2$ ^{d}nin-lil$_2$-la$_2$-ka
  "Who causes joy for the heart of the goddess Ninlil."
  Inscription to Išme-Dagān
  (Frayne 1990: E.41.4.8: 23)

THE HEART IS A CONTAINER FOR NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

- **lipiš**

  "Inner body"; "heart"; "anger", "rage" (Jaques 2006: 547)
  Probably a Semitic loan-word from the Akkadian *libbu.*

- **lipiš-bala** "anger" (ePSD).

  $ša_3$ ib_2 -ba lipiš-bal-a-ne_2
  $aš_2$-gig-ga ḫe_2-en-e

  "[May the goddess Inana] with anger in heart and in her wrathful mood utter a terrible curse."
  Inscription to Rīm-Sîn
  (Frayne 1990: E.4.2.14.23: 49–50)

THE EYE IS A CONTAINER FOR POSITIVE EMOTIONS

- **igi bar**

"To gaze at some object in a certain manner" (ePSD); "sehen", "anblicken" (Fincke 2000: 26); "to look with approval" (Dicks 2012: 13).

igi sag$_9$-ga-zu nam-til$_3$ si-a lugal-ra igi-zid bar-mu-un-ši-ib
"With your favorable eye full of life, you rightly look upon the ruler!"
Rīm-Sîn B (ETCSL c.2.6.9.2, 50)

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THE EYE IS A CONTAINER FOR NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

- **igi ḫul**
  (**igi** “eye”+ **ḫul** “bad”)
  “To look malevolently”, “to glare”, “to look with envy” (Dicks 2012: 282); “der bösen Blick” (Fincke 2000: 51, 120).

igi ḫu-luḫ-ḫa-zu-ne
gu_2-$erim_2$-ŋal_2 su
ḫe_2-ḫe-em-da-sag_8-ge-de_3

“When you make all enemies tremble with your frightening look.”
Lipit-Eštar D (ETCSL c.2.5.5.4, 18)

PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS

Source: animals, animal behavior, animal characteristics

Target: people (esp. the ruler), the gods.

In Sumerian, this metaphor instantiates **cultural conceptualizations** that go back to the very beginning of the Mesopotamian history.

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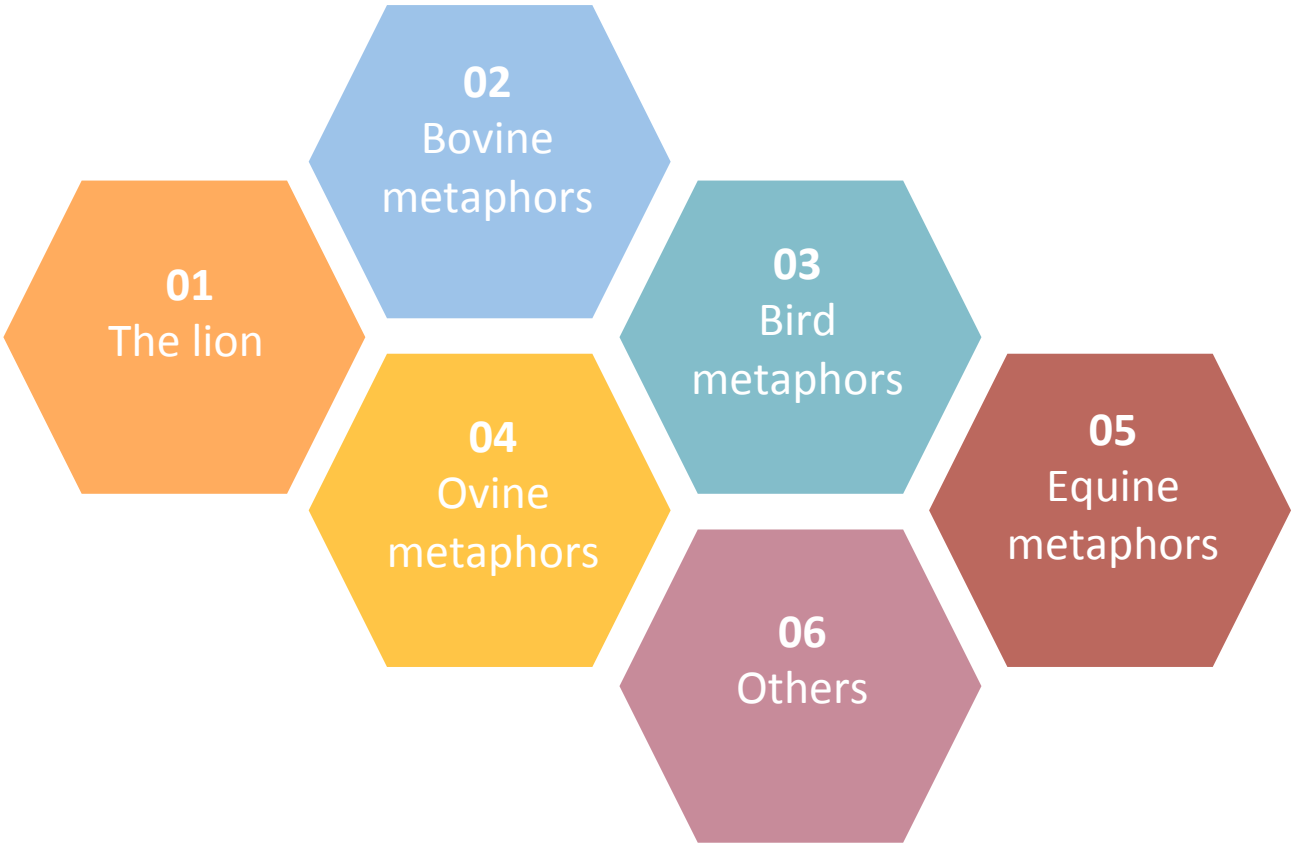
Most common animal metaphors in Sumerian

- PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS is found in many different languages.
- Animal characteristics attributed to people are not necessarily real characteristics of animals, but rather cultural linked properties.
- Sumerian language has no generic term for "animal."



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piriŋzag dib gaba-ri
nu-tuku-me-en
“I am a lion who has no equal.”
Lipit-Eštar A (ETCSL c.2.5.5.1, 6)

01
The lion

02
Bovine metaphors

am u_3-na gub-ba saḫar
kad_4-kad_4-e-me-en

"I am a belligerent wild bull, *kicking up* the dust everywhere."

Išme-Dagān A+V (ETCSL c.2.5.4.01, 246)

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ḫul-du-zu sim^{mušen}-gin$_7$
ḫa-ra-ur$_4$-ru
zar-re-eš ḫa-ra-ab-sal-
“May you catch your malefactors like swallows; may you pile them up in heaps!”
Lipit Eštar E (ETCSL c.2.5.5.5, 24)

03
Bird metaphors

04
Ovine metaphors

nibru^{ki} maš$_2$ ⌜saŋ⌝ [kalam-ma]
"Nippur: the lead goat of the Land."
Inscription to Ur-Ninurta
(Frayne 1990: E.4.1.6.2: ii 14')

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^{anše}si$_2$-si$_2$ ḫar-ra-an-na kun sud-sud-[X]

[He, the ruler, is] a horse waving its tail on the highway

Išme-Dagan S (ETCSL c.2.5.19, 17)

05
Equine metaphors

PEOPLE ARE PLANTS

Source Domain: plants, trees

Target Domain: people

Trees are a metaphor of VERTICALITY and SCALE

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ŋiš-bur ma-da-na
"*Tree* (?) of his land."
Inscription to Warad-Sîn
(Frayne 1990: E.4.2.13.13: 29)

^{ŋiš}isimu$_2$^{sar} ^{ŋiš}erin-na-gin$_7$
saŋ mu-il$_2$-la-ta
"I lifted my head up, like a cedar sapling."
Lipit-Eštar A
(ETCSL c.2.5.5.1, 3)

numun-a-ne$_2$ daŋal-la
"His seed is widespread."
Letter from Sîn-idinam to the god Utu
(ETCSL c.3.2.05, 25)

^{ŋiš}isimu$_2$^{sar} ^{ŋiš}erin-na tir
ḫa-šu-ur$_2$-ra-me-en
"I am the sprout of a cedar, a forest of cypresses."
Išme-Dagān A+V
(ETCSL c.2.5.4.01, 254)

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FEELING IS LIGHT

Source domain: light, bright, radiance

Target domain: feelings, emotional states

Cross-culturally widespread

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ni_2 , $me\text{-}lam_2$

"Frightening splendor", "fearsome radiance."

ni_2 $me\text{-}lam_2$ gur_3-ru
"Who is clad in awe and frightening splendor."
Inscription to Warad-Sîn (Frayne 1990: E.4.2.13.3: 3)

ḫuš

- "Furious" and "angry"; **ḫuš-a** "reddish" (= shining like bronze)
- Often collocated with lexical units describing weapons and war suggesting the ideas of **power** and **wrath**.

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Conclusions

Conceptual metaphors can be traced in Sumerian inscriptions and hymns. They are a very **useful framework for understanding the Sumerian conceptual system.**

Conceptual metaphors like THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS provide further support for the claim that **there is close interaction between language, body and culture**.

These metaphors may be understood in the context of a changing **society with multiethnic structure,** oscillating between change and continuity.

thank
you

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