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Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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Verba Dicendi in Akkadian

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Abstract

Verba dicendi are among the most widespread lexemes in Indo-European cultures, reflecting the oral matrix of the milieu. Until now, it is not clear if the ancient Near Eastern cultures also had a predilection for these lexemes. To understand the importance and function of *verba dicendi*, they have to be studied in a wide range of texts of different types and from different periods. The focus of this analysis is to monitor the diachrony and synchrony of lexical and semantic nuances, as well as syntactic variations, along with quantitative analyses. The article is intended as a precursor to a more detailed study on *verba dicendi*, which will offer a linear treatment of the topic, and discuss collocations and other related lexemes in relation to direct speech.

Status Quaestionis

Verba dicendi are mainly attested in literary texts, and this is also the case in cuneiform languages.[1] This

1- One anonymous peer reviewer kindly pointed out that there are many examples of direct speech in Akkadian letters, typically expressed using the words *umma* and *-mi*, a topic which I would like to explore further in the future.

I wish to thank the conference conveners, Parsa Daneshmand and Magnus Widell, for hosting the meeting online in the middle of the pandemic. The event was so lively and stimulating that it was just as good as meeting face-to-face. I would also like to thank the conveners for including me into the conference proceedings, and for their support and care helping me publish this somewhat streamlined version of my presentation.

abundance likely indicated the oral substrate.[2] The "conventional formulae" (i.e. "X opened his mouth and spoke/said a word to Y") in introducing direct speech were first studied by Franz Sonnek in 1940. Sonnek limited his study to examples in the epic texts that would not presuppose any concrete situation. In other words, only expressions conveying a meaning "to say, speak, answer," etc. but not "to shout, lament," etc.[3]

In his monograph from 1974, Karl Hecker took Sonnek's research further, especially in Chapter 6 'Epische Formeln,' where he focused on the style in the epic formulae.[4]

Rather than limiting her study to the "conventional formulae," Marianna E. Vogelzang focused her attention on patterns demonstrating "the setting of the subsequent direct discourse." According to her, "the connection in which the speech receives its meaning will depend on the manner in which the poet provides the subsequent spoken words with his covering commentary, on the manner in which the speech will be embedded." [5]

In this paper, this cannot be done in an exhaustive way, as there is not sufficient secondary literature for a precise reconstruction. Thus, preliminary indications will be given here on the *verba dicendi* to which further analyses can be linked in subsequent phases.

The Origin of *Verba Dicendi*

Verba dicendi frequently originate from roots that refer to mental processes, such as "to plan, reason, judge, think," etc. For example, **men-* "think" > Hittite *memahhi* "I speak," and "come later to be used for oral expression of these processes."[6]

Range of Akkadian Verbs of Saying

There are formulaic expressions involving verbs + the word *pû* "mouth" or "to speak." The most widespread expression of this type is *pâ epēšu*, literally "to do the mouth."[7] Others include: *pâ abālu*, *amû*, *ina pî aṣû*, *dabābu*, *hâdu*, *qabû*, *amāta, qurrubu, rigma nadû, ina šapti šakānu, šasû, têlu, zakāru.*[8]

Verba dicendi are not only used to introduce direct speech, but also to indicate (i) a perception, usually signaled by "to see" or "to hear," and (ii) a reaction, be it emotive, mental, or physical.[9] They have several different nuances, including the aspectual nuance of "to speak" rather than "to say,"[10] *zakāru*, with the nuances of "to pray, vow, declare,"[11] and *dabābu* (Š) "to persuade."[12] Due to their frequent occurrences, they are especially valid in tracking changes in lexicon, semantics, and syntax.

2- See e.g. Rose 2013: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-448X_eagll_SIM_00000545, accessed on July 11, 2021.

3- Sonnek 1940: 225.

4- Hecker 1974: 174-181.

5- Vogelzang 1990: 50.

6- Buck 1915: 137.

7- CAD E, 215-216.

8- For a longer list, see Cohen 2011: 195.

9- See Vogelzang 1990: 51.

10- In Greek *eírō* "to say" is cognate with Hittite *wer(i)ye* "to call, summon."

11- CAD Z, 16-22. In Greek *eúkhomai* "to pray, vow, declare" cf. Linear B middle e-u-ke-to = *eúkhetoi*. See Hooker 1980, 53. In Greek *aráomai* also belongs to the semantic domain of "to pray, wish, curse." It is cognate with Hittite *ariya* "pray," Vedic *āryati* "praises." For a full list, see Owen and Goodspeed 1969: 4-22.

12- CAD D, 6.

Range of Structures Introducing Direct Speech

By monitoring the use of *verba dicendi* and saying formulae – and then analyzing the mode of insertion of direct and indirect speech in the narrative – I have noticed that they could be placed before direct speech, within direct speech, or indeed *following* direct speech. Furthermore, based on the analyses performed, I have deduced that direct speech can begin abruptly, i.e. without an introductory formula. In such cases, the *verbum dicendi* is merely implied. All in all, the following four structures can be identified:

1. *verbum dicendi* placed before direct speech
2. *verbum dicendi* placed within direct speech
3. *verbum dicendi* placed after direct speech
4. *verbum dicendi* implied

Illustration and Examples of *Verba Dicendi* Structure

Structure 1

Tab I, 275 (Gilgameš):[13]

275. ⌈d⌉GIŠ-*gím-maš ana šá-ši-ma izakkar*(MU)⌈ár⌉ *ana ummi*(AMA)-*šú*
275. Gilgameš said to her, to his mother.

Tab VI, 87-88 (Gilgameš):[14]

87. d*a-num pa-a-šú īpuš*(DÙ)^{uš}*-ma iqabbi*(DAG_4.GA)
88. *i-zak-ka-ra a-na ru-bu-ti* d*iš$_8$-tár*

87. Anu opened his mouth to speak,
88. saying to the lady Ištar.

Tab I, 9 (Erra):[15]

9. *i-qab-bi-ma a-na ka-šá lu-ṣi-ma a-na ṣēri*
9. It says to you: "I want to go out on the (battle)-field!"

Tab I, 33 (Erra)[16]

33. *i-qab-bi ana šá-né-e kīma* d*Girri ku-bu-um-ma hu-muṭ kīma* [*n*]*ab-li*
33. He said to the second one: "Burn like fire, blaze like [f]lame!"

13- George 2003: 554-555.
14- George 2003: 624-625.
15- Cagni 1969: 58.
16- Cagni 1969: 60.

Structure 2

Tab I, 46 (Gilgameš):[17]

46. *ù ki-i* [d]GIŠ-*gím-maš i-qab-bu-ú a-na-ku-ma šarru*(LUGAL)
46. And can say like Gilgameš, "It is I am the king?"

Tab V, 52-53 (Erra):[18]

52. *rubû šá ta-nit-ti qar-ra-du-ti-ia i-dub-bu-bu ma-hi-ra a-a ir-ši*
53. lú*nāru šá i-ṣar-ra-hu ul i-mat ina šip-ṭi*

52. The prince who sings the praise(s) of my heroism is unrivalled.
53. The singer who exalts (him) will not die in the destruction.

Structure 3

Tab XII, 100-101 (Gilgameš):[19]

100. [*be-lum ù'-a*] *iq-bi-ma* [*i-na e*]*p-ri it-ta-pal-si-ih*
101. [dGIŠ-*gím-maš ù'-a*] *iq-bi-ma* [*i-na ep-r*]*i it-ta-pal-si-ih*

100. "[Woe!]" Said [the lord,] and threw himself prostrate [in the] dust.
101. "[Woe!]" Said [Gilgameš,] and threw himself prostrate [in the dust].

Tab IV, 16 (Erra):[20]

16. *šá im-gúr-*d*en-líl uṣ-ṣa elī-šú tum-mid-ma u-ù'-a lìb-bi i-qab-bi*
16. Against (the wall) Imgur-Enlil, you shot the arrow: "Woe! My heart" it exclaims.

Tab IV, 36 (Erra)[21]

36. *bēlu rabû* d*Marduk i-mur-ma ù'-a iq-ta-bi lìb-ba-šú iṣ-ṣa-bat*
36. The great lord Marduk saw and exclaimed: "Woe!" His heart was touched.

17- George 2003: 540-541.
18- Cagni 1969: 128.
19- George 2003: 732-733.
20- Cagni 1969: 106.
21- Cagni 1969: 108.

Structure 4

Tab II, 38-40 (Gilgameš):[22]

38. ^{lú}*rē'û*(SIPA)-*ú-tú pu-uh-hu-rat eli*(UGU)-*šú*
39. *ina ṭè-mi-šu-nu-ma ina ra-ma-ni-šú-ma*
40. *eṭlu*(GURUŠ) *a-na* ^{md}GIŠ-*gím-maš ki-i ma-šil la-a-n*[*u*]

38. The band of shepherds was gathered around him,
39. of their own will and by himself:
40. "This fellow – how similar to Gilgameš he is in buil[d]..."

Tab IV, 40-42 (Gilgameš):[23]

40. ⌜*i*⌝-*li-ma* ^{d}GIŠ-*gím-maš ina muh-*[*hi šá-di-i*]
41. [*m*]*aṣhat*(ZÌ.MAD.GÁ)-*su ut-te-qa-a* [*ana hur-sa-a-ni*]
42. [*š*]*adû*(KUR)^{ú} *bi-i-la šu-ut-t*[*a a-mat damiqti*? *lu-mur*]

40. Gilgameš went up to the top [of the mountain],
41. He made his offering of *maṣhatu* flour [to the hill].
42. "O mountain, bring me a dream, [let me see a message of good fortune!]"

Tab I, 8 (Erra):[24]

8. *ana* ^{d}*Sibitti qar-rad la šá-na-an na-an-di-qa kak-*⌜*ke*⌝-*ku-un*
8. To Sibitti, peerless heroes: "Put on you your weapons!"

Tab I, 18 (Erra)[25]

18. *ana* ^{d}*Sibitti qar-rad la šá-na-an a-na šub-te-ku-nu* ⌜*tu*⌝-*ra-ma*
18. To Sibitti, peerless heroes: "Go back to your places!"

Concluding Remarks

In order to track changes in lexicon, semantics, and syntax, a study might be carried out on a wide range of texts, and be both quantitative and qualitative in nature, so that the results obtained can be compared. Particularly in the case of texts of which there are several versions, it will be possible to study the phenomenon in a broader context. This will facilitate an understanding of the "evolution" of these texts, from the more archaic to the later stages of textual transmission.

22- George 2003: 560-561.
23- George 2003: 590-591.
24- Cagni 1969: 58.
25- Cagni 1969: 60.

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