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Language Death and Dying Reconsidered: the Rôle of Late Babylonian as a Vernacular Language

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Abstract: This contribution intends to engage with the intricate question of whether Late Babylonian was a spoken language or merely a literary language, an issue that has been discussed at length by numerous scholars and from different points of view. It examines selected linguistic features drawn from Neo- and Late Babylonian letters and legal documents and argues that the development of these features throughout the history of Akkadian during the first millennium BC confirms the influence of native speakers. It may thus give fresh impetus to the underlying discussion as to when (Late) Babylonian ceased to be a spoken language.

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1. Introduction*

In Assyriological studies the term Late Babylonian is usually applied to the Akkadian of letters, legal and administrative documents written in Babylonia from the Chaldean (or Achaemenid) dynasty's rise to power onwards until the disappearance of cuneiform writing (roughly 626 (539) BC – AD 75).¹ Neo-Babylonian, on the other hand, refers to the Babylonian dialect of the three preceding centuries. Mainly based on historical events, this classification is largely arbitrary to a large extent and does not fully account for the complex linguistic changes which occurred during the first millennium BC. In fact, a comparison of the language of Late Babylonian letters from the sixth century BC and that of letters, which were drafted in the second century BC, reveals demonstrably more differences than does a comparison of Neo- and early Late Babylonian letters. In Assyriology, however, research of these linguistic differences was either neglected in general, or not based on a descriptive approach to the language (according to modern descriptive linguistics). Instead, it seems widely accepted that they are indicative of a general language decline in the first millennium BC. It is therefore no surprise that Late Babylonian “*has been relegated by professional grammarians into the limbo of spät-und-schlecht*”, as the great scholar A.L. Oppenheim tellingly states in his book *Letters from Mesopotamia*.² The following characterizations, collected from grammars and also recent textbooks, clearly illustrate to what Oppenheim is alluding:

“Das Spätbabylonische (spB) ist die Sprache der Chaldäer-, Perser- und Seleukiden-Arsakidenzeit (nach 625 [v.Chr.]). Trotz krampfhafter Altertümelei in den Königsinschriften der Chaldäer und in weit geringerem Masse in der sonstigen Literatur wird es immer mehr zu einer babylonisch-aramäischen Mischsprache, die nur Schrift- und Gelehrtensprache ist, während das Volk Aramäisch spricht. Der sprachliche Verfall ist auf allen Gebieten spürbar.”

von Soden 1995³ (= GAG): § 2h

“Das Spätbab. (...), das wohl nur noch eine Schriftsprache war, ist noch stärker aramaisiert als das Neubab., von dem es sich vor allem durch noch weiter gehende sprachliche Verwilderung unterscheidet; (...) Der spB Satzbau kann nur unter ständiger Bezugnahme auf die aram. Syntax angemessen dargestellt werden. (...)”

von Soden 1995³ (= GAG): § 193a/c

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¹ Note that it is not the aim of this article to investigate the eventual disappearance of cuneiform, i.e., the end of cuneiform tradition, as has been done by Geller 1997 and Brown 2008 (compare Cooper 2008). After all, the use of cuneiform *per se* is certainly not indicative of a living Late Babylonian vernacular. See, e.g., Brown 2008: 80.

² Oppenheim 1967: 43.

“Late Babylonian, (...), is the language written at a time when Akkadian was no longer a spoken language, after it had been replaced by Aramaic.”

Buccellati 1996: 2

“Immer stärker werdende aramäische Einflüsse im Neubabylonischen und Neuassyrischen weisen darauf hin, dass das Aramäische um die Mitte des Ersten Jahrtausends v. Ch. [sic] das Akkadische als Umgangssprache verdrängt hat.”

Kienast 2001: 5

“Private letters become very rare after about 450 BC, a development that signals for most scholars the final extinction of a vernacular Babylonian tongue, after a long decline.”

George 2007: 61

“Late Babylonian was written during the late Persian period and the subsequent Seleucid occupation of Babylonia; it is heavily influenced by Aramaic, the spoken language of the time.”

Huehnergard/Woods 2008: 84

The reasons for these conclusions are twofold. On the one hand, they are clearly drawn from the impression that texts written in Late Babylonian display an increasing incidence of ‘decadent’ orthography, frozen forms, incorrect morphology and corrupt syntax. All these ‘symptoms’ of a putative language decline are, for the most part, accounted for with the assumption that Imperial Aramaic, the supposed *lingua franca* of that time, exerted a major influence on the last subphase/dialect of Akkadian. It thus gradually turned into a hybrid-language. On the other hand, they are also based on external factors (i.e., of extra-linguistic influence) which are commonly held accountable for the death of Late Babylonian as a spoken language. Three major factors can be isolated. First, there is the notion that alphabetic scripts were easier to use than the logo-syllabic cuneiform script.³ This, in due course, came to marginalize Late Babylonian being written therein. Second, it is supposed that the diminishing status of the Babylonian temples⁴, which can positively be regarded as *the* centres of scribal training in Mesopotamia, led to a steadily decreasing number of people capable of writing cuneiform script. And third, new administrative demands, established under foreign rule and directly or indirectly imposed on existing structures⁵, gradually supplanted the importance of cuneiform script within administration.

The cursory nature of these statements raises the question of whether there is indeed enough compelling evidence to indicate a general language decline in the first millennium BC. If we suppose that this is not the case, how are we to account for this ‘*spät-und-schlecht*’ notion within Assyriology? And how do these statements conform to the current state of our knowledge about Late Babylonian?

In discussing Late Babylonian grammar, the following considerations – simple as they may seem – are often disregarded. Like any other language which continues to be used over a substantial amount of time Akkadian was no doubt subject to innovation and development. These changes are not necessarily encouraged by contact languages. Furthermore, not only are most writing systems inadequately equipped to render the very languages for which they were conceived, but they also

³ E.g., Sherwin-White/Kuhrt 1993: 160. On the ‘advantages’ of cuneiform writing see section 5 of the present article.

⁴ Against this suggestion, see most recently van der Spek 2006: 277 who argues “*that the Babylonian temples [during the Hellenistic period] were sizable and active organizations with a substantial work force of several hundred and probably thousand persons involved in cult, agriculture and manufacture*”.

⁵ In fact, cuneiform legal records of the Seleucid period exhibit changes in form, content and distribution (see, e.g., Stolper 1994: 330 and Oelsner 2003: 296f.). Also, some deeds ceased to be recorded in cuneiform (see, e.g., Stolper 1989: 90f.). These developments are likely to be the result of royal regulations (see, e.g., Doty 1977: 322f., 328–332 and Oelsner 1978: 109). However, it has been argued that these regulations, issued by the new rulers, did not put an end to cuneiform recording in general (see, e.g., Stolper 1994: 341).

tend to adhere to certain orthographical conventions. It is therefore no surprise that Late Babylonian texts, employing a writing system that was adopted for earlier stages of the language and gradually evolved (probably under the influence of the Aramaic alphabetic script)⁶, to feature unorthodox or unexpected renderings. As long as there are native speakers, these shortcomings do not pose much of a problem. But since we are dealing with a dead language, we have to bear in mind that our picture of the linguistic reality, merely reflected by the written word, remains incomplete.

Recent studies⁷ suggest that morphological mistakes and improper spellings in Late Babylonian texts can largely be attributed to orthographic constraints of the cuneiform script⁸, and are not suggestive of scribes whose native language was not Akkadian. This hypothesis finds further support in the syntax of the texts under consideration. Studies on the syntax of the Late Babylonian letters reveal a consistent, but not a petrified⁹, grammatical system that demands competence in the language. They also prove that syntactic interference in Late Babylonian under the influence of Aramaic is almost absent in texts from the late seventh, sixth and early fifth centuries BC.¹⁰

Given the lack of sufficient direct evidence, any theory concerning the impact of external factors is based on a set of assumptions which cannot be verified with (any degree of) certainty, and is thus difficult to substantiate. For example, the nearly complete absence of individual voices in our sources makes it very difficult to investigate social factors like the functions the language serves in a speech community (e.g., religious, interpersonal, business) or the ‘larger society’s’ attitude toward the language and its speakers. This means that without the support of linguistic research external factors alone cannot be invoked to corroborate the early death of Late Babylonian.

The issues involved in the reconstruction of external factors, force us to focus on arguments that are linguistic in nature. Unfortunately, the scarcity of studies on Late Babylonian¹¹, clearly a consequence of the ‘*spät-und-schlecht*’ notion discussed above, makes it difficult to pursue linguistic developments within the last phase of Akkadian. It is thus important to emphasize the need for further studies in this field.

The present article offers one such study. It investigates developments and innovations in the syntactic area of subordination and explores the question of interference between Late Babylonian and Aramaic.

⁶ Streck 2001: 87–90.

⁷ See especially Streck 2001 and *in press*.

⁸ Streck 2001: 89 (“*Der Versuch, strukturelle Eigenschaften der vokallosen Konsonantenschrift in das Keilschriftsystem zu übertragen, konnte einerseits diese Grenzen teilweise überwinden, führte andererseits aber zu einer sich etwa in der Vokalnotation von der Sprache weiter distanzierenden sehr komplexen Orthographie, die durch die Kombinierbarkeit der oben genannten orthographischen Typen [i.e., CVC-signs indifferent to the vowel, non-notation of vowels, morphographemic writing, etc.] innerhalb eines einzigen Wortes noch zusätzlich an Kompliziertheit gewinnt*”).

⁹ I.e., a high incidence of archaic forms and older lexical items, etc.

¹⁰ Streck 1995: xxiiiif. and II § 50 (“*Aramäischer Einfluß auf das akkadische Verbsystem kann vermutlich nur bei der Ausbildung von modalem *iprus* – und auch hier nicht als entscheidender Faktor – festgestellt werden*”) and Hackl 2007: 149f.

¹¹ Major studies are Streck 1995, Hueter 1996 and Hackl 2007. Another study of major importance is Woodington 1982, even though this grammar is based on the older Neo-Babylonian letters from Nineveh.

2. Corpus of the present study

(a) *Late Babylonian sources* In view of the sheer number of Late Babylonian (non-literary) texts currently available (21,000 +)¹², it is obvious that a study of the entire corpus could not be carried out within the scope of this article. Nevertheless, since the present study aims to shed light on the living use of Late Babylonian, we are less interested in formulaic legal and administrative texts, that is, the overwhelming majority of the Late Babylonian text corpus, than in letters. This textual genre has the advantage of making the fullest use of the language as an instrument to deal with individual and complex communicative needs. Hence, letters are more valuable in assessing vernacular than formalized economic texts and the like.

Among the Late Babylonian texts that have come down to us, there are more than 2000 official and private letters (note that this figure includes fragments).¹³ Unfortunately, the diachronic distribution of the material is uneven. The suppression of the revolts against Xerxes (485–465 BC) resulted in a drastic decline of cuneiform recording in Babylonia, affecting economic texts and letters alike.¹⁴ Overall, there are only about 120 letters postdating the second regnal year of Xerxes (see Appendix 2).¹⁵ The concentration of the material in the late seventh, the sixth and early fifth centuries BC and the fact that the bulk of these late letters are essentially administrative texts ('letter orders')¹⁶, forces us to draw upon legal documents as well. Thus, linguistic observations of the Akkadian from the fifth century BC onwards are based on letters and legal documents alike. Most of the late texts that were sifted through for the present study can be found in the following publications:

- fifth century BC: BE 9, 10, PBS 2/1, Stolper, *Entrepreneurs*, Donbaz/Stolper, *Istanbul Muraşû Texts*, TMH 2/3 and UCP 9/3
- fourth century BC onwards: *BiMes* 24, BRM 2, CT 49, OECT 9 and VS 15

(b) *Neo-Babylonian sources* Diachronic comparative research is based on Neo-Babylonian letters of two corpora. The first corpus dates to the mid-eighth century (~ 755–727 BC) and comprises 112 letters pertaining to the so-called Early Neo-

¹² M. Jursa, private communication.

¹³ A list of the published material can be found in Hackl 2007: 4–6 together with Appendix 2 of the present article. Note the following addenda (a), corrigenda (b) and delenda (c): a) CT 55, 776 (1 letter order without epistolary introduction); CT 56, 273, 286², 397, 752 (4 letter orders without epistolary introduction); CT 57, 27, 604, 807, 893, 1000², 1008 (6 letter orders without epistolary introduction); *Cyr.* 81, 103, 107 (3 letter orders without epistolary introduction); *Nbn.* 56 (= LOS no. 1), 73, 80, 94, 295, 407 (= LOS no. 2), 860, 878, 917, 919 (10 letter orders without epistolary introduction); Jursa 1999: t15 (BM 42351), t49 (BM 42616 + 43740), t52 (BM 42646 + 43612) and t67 (BM 43673) (4 letter orders); Waerzeggers 2003/2004: no. 3, 165 (BM 25897) (1 letter); Hackl *apud* Kleber 2011 (BM 30688) (1 letter); Hackl 2010 (PTS 2027) (1 letter); OIP 122, 163f. (2 letters) b) *Cyr.* 375 = CT 51, 71; CT 55, 52 (BM 57787) + BM 83379 + 83385 = LOS no. 95; JNES 48 304 = LOS no. 80; PBS 1/2, 89 = Fs. Hilprecht 424f. CBM 3632; PSBA 33 157ff. (2! letters); c) *** A significant fraction of the corpus – a fifth of it or more – still remains unpublished. The letters from private archives will be fully edited in a separate monograph by M. Jursa, M. Schmidl, K. Wagensohn and the present author. The bulk of the unpublished letters is housed in the British Museum and the Princeton Theological Seminary. On Late Babylonian copies of royal letters from earlier periods, see Frahm 2005.

¹⁴ It has recently been shown that the uprisings at the beginning of the reign of Xerxes lead to reprisals against the Northern Babylonian elites which resulted in a break in the documentation. See Waerzeggers 2003/2004, Kessler 2004 and Baker 2008.

¹⁵ The scarcity of letters after about 450 BC, as George 2007: 61 put it, “signals for most scholars the final extinction of a vernacular Babylonian tongue”. This proposition is somewhat problematic. Keeping in mind the limited literacy in the ancient Near East, it seems highly unlikely that this break in the documentation, clearly politically induced (see n. 14), immediately had socio-linguistic ramifications.

¹⁶ The majority of these letters belongs to the brewer's archive from Borsippa (late fourth century BC). See Jursa 2005: 97 with further references.

Babylonian Governor's Archive from Nippur.¹⁷ Housed in the Iraq Museum and therefore physically unavailable for Assyriological studies at present, they were edited in the mid-nineties. The second corpus belongs to the famous Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum which was unearthed at Tell Kouyunjik in the second half of the 19th century.¹⁸ The bulk of the material has recently been (re-) edited by the State Archives of Assyria Project. More than 1100 letters can be assigned to this corpus. They cover a period of roughly 100 years, beginning approximately in 725 BC. Unfortunately, the scarcity of textual material extant from the tenth and ninth century BC decisively hampers comparative research with the later Neo- and Late Babylonian texts.

3. Subordinate clauses as an indicator of linguistic development

As touched upon above, the texts under consideration contain linguistic features that reject the idea of Late Babylonian as a dead language. One of these linguistic features is the extension of finite complementation which entailed a significant impact on the syntactic area of subordination. The following sections present a diachronic survey of the use of finite complementation and associated developments in Babylonian with a special focus on the developments after the sixth century BC.

In linguistics, definitions for complementation are inconsistent.¹⁹ Such constructions are either referred to as *clauses which function as the subject or object of a verb* (sometimes simply as object clauses), or as *clauses which are arguments of the verb*. Although both definitions are often considered to be equivalent, they imply different structural concepts. The first definition explicitly states that complements always have to function as objects or subjects. However, a brief examination of the verb classes employed in the main clause shows that not every predicate, i.e., the verb in the main clause, takes objects (e.g., intransitive verbs as in '*I am angry that you did not come*'). Nor does the '*that clause*' of the preceding example function as subject. It is therefore demonstrably wrong to designate them as subject or object clauses.

The second definition interprets complements as arguments of the predicate, contrasting them with peripheral elements which are not part of the verb phrase.²⁰ It stresses their status as arguments, and not their equation with objects. Following this definition, we may distinguish two basic types of subordinate clauses: complement clauses²¹ which are arguments of the predicate and adverbial clauses which are peripheral elements.

Within the framework of his study on sentential complementation in Akkadian, G. Deutscher dedicated a large section of his book²² to the emergence of finite complementation. He demonstrates not only that complement clauses emerged most likely in the Old Babylonian period, but also illustrates how they evolved throughout the history of Akkadian. In his conclusion he stresses the fact that the use of complement clauses is thought to be a general trend within many languages in order to respond to the development of more complex communicative needs.²³

¹⁷ Cole 1996. See also Jursa 1997/1998, van Driel 1998 and Streck 1999.

¹⁸ See in general Fincke 2003/2004. Linguistic research on this corpus is based on the material collected by Dietrich 1968 and Woodington 1982.

¹⁹ See the detailed discussion of the problems involved in Deutscher 2000: 7–11.

²⁰ "*An argument is a category which denotes the intimacy in the relation between an element and a predicate. An argument (as opposed to an adjunct, or a peripheral element) is a central element, which is required by the predicate, and which in some sense 'completes' a missing part in the interpretation of the predicate*" (Deutscher 2000: 9).

²¹ Note that in the following, such constructions will be designated as complement clauses (instead of complementation or finite complementation), a term which is more common in Assyriological studies.

²² Deutscher 2000.

²³ Deutscher 2000: 184f.

In order to put the emergence of the complement clause in its historical context, it may be useful to give a brief summary of Deutscher's findings regarding the Old and Middle Babylonian period.²⁴

The development of complement clauses from adverbial clauses is the result of a combination of two semantic changes:²⁵

- (a) The causal meaning of the conjunction *kīma* ('because') was bleached into a factive meaning ('that' or 'about the fact that'). This bleaching process of semantic change required particular 'bridging contexts' in which both a causal and a factive interpretation of the '*kīma* clause' are possible: e.g., *kīma ittija itawû alpam šātu alqûšu ašpurakkum*²⁶ 'I wrote to you because/that he spoke to me and I took this ox from him'
- (b) In certain contexts, the status of the '*kīma* clause' changed from peripheral element to argument, i.e., '*kīma* clauses' forged an intimate link with the verb in the main clause.

'Bridging contexts' were formed by speech-related verbs such as 'to speak', 'to complain', 'to inform' and the like. This verb class either allows for a causal or a factive interpretation of the '*kīma* clause' (depending on the given context). Note that these changes did not cause any abrupt structural changes.

Soon after these changes occurred, the use of factive '*kīma* clauses' was extended to verbs of knowledge and perception. Unlike speech-related verbs, these verb classes render a causal interpretation impossible (or at least implausible), i.e., their use marks factive '*kīma* clauses' apart from adverbial '*kīma* clauses'. Later in Old Babylonian, this distinction is also marked by structural changes. The most significant one is the position of complement clauses. The (older) sentence-initial position is gradually changed in favour of a post-verbal position. In Middle Babylonian this post-verbal position becomes the norm. Moreover, the conjunction, or, to be more specific, the complementizer *kīma* is reduced to *kī*. Note that both in Old and Middle Babylonian complement clauses are employed alongside other syntactic strategies conveying the same idea. These alternative constructions are infinitive complements and asyndetic parataxis.

After this brief sketch of the developments in the preceding subphases of Babylonian, the following sections (see sections 3.a–3.c) elaborate on the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods. As noted above, special emphasis will be put on the fifth century BC and the subsequent centuries, since Deutscher limits himself to the first half of the first millennium BC.²⁷ This is probably due to the simple reason that pertinent textual material from subsequent centuries is extremely scarce when compared with the sixth century BC (see section 2). And yet, there is enough textual evidence to allow us to pursue the matter further. From the fifth century BC onwards complement clauses start to appear in legal documents as well. This is no surprise, since due to their formalized nature legal and administrative documents adopt linguistic innovations at a slower pace.

3.a. Complement clauses during the Neo-Babylonian subphase

By the time the early Neo-Babylonian letters from Nippur were drafted (second half of the eighth century BC), complement clauses are solely construed with the verb *edû* 'to know'. Verbs of perception and speech are not used in that context. Hence, complement clauses are always object clauses in that corpus. See (1) for an example of an object clause with *kī*.

²⁴ Deutscher 2000: 37–60.

²⁵ A detailed discussion of the developments can be found in Deutscher 2000: 41–51.

²⁶ [k]i-i-ma i-te-ia i-ta-wu-û, al-pa-am ša-t[u] al-qû-û-š[u], aš-pu-ra-kum (AbB 8, 26: 3'–5').

²⁷ Deutscher's Late Babylonian examples are mainly drawn from texts of the two well-known Babylonian temple archives: Ebabbar (CT 22) and Eanna (BIN 1, YOS 3, etc.). The majority of these texts dates to the sixth century BC.

- (1) OIP 114, 97: 25–26; letter, undated (eighth century BC)
 «a^ˀ-na-ku **i-de ki-i** «šuk^ˀ.hi.^ˀa^ˀ, «i^ˀ-ba-áš-šú-ú ‘I **know** indeed **that** rations are available.’

Verbs like *šemû* ‘to hear’, *amāru* ‘to see’ or *qabû* ‘to speak’, on the other hand, are mainly bound to the particle *umma* in order to introduce direct speech. See (2). Though the same idea could have easily been conveyed by means of a complement clause, the writers of these letters refrained from doing so. Aside from direct speech, the verb *šemû* ‘to hear’ is used in the so-called ‘as you know’ construction as well. Though this construction cannot be considered as complementation proper, it fulfills a very similar function as does the complement clause. In fact, they are almost interchangeable. Deutscher refers to it as the ‘as you know’ construction, since the verb *edû* ‘to know’ was the first verb to appear in that context.²⁸ Note that in the Nippur corpus the ‘as you know’ construction is always combined with the particle *umma* and hence with direct speech. Example (3) gives such a construction.

- (2) OIP 114, 97: 26–29; letter, undated (eighth century BC)
gab-bi, «a^ˀ-šem-mu-ma **um-ma** a-ga-^ˀa^ˀ, [nig.g]a lú šá be-lí-šú ri-mu-^ˀtu^ˀ, «i-ri^ˀ-mu-^ˀšú^ˀ ‘I **hear** everybody (saying) **as follows**: “This is the [estat]e of a man whose lord has given it to him as a land grant.”’
- (3) OIP 114, 96: 10–11; letter, undated (eighth century BC)
ki-i **áš-mu-ú um-ma**, an.bar šá šeš-ia i-ba-áš-šú ‘As I have heard **as follows**: “The iron of my brother is available.”’
 (~ I have heard that ...)

In the Neo-Babylonian letters from Nineveh the functional potential of the complement clause corresponds basically to that in the Nippur letters outlined above. Nevertheless, one major innovation needs to be stressed. Apart from introducing relative clauses and being used in apposition after the governing noun in genitive constructions (periphrastic genitive), the particle *ša* is henceforth employed as an alternative complementizer. Although it is still less frequently used than *kī* (with its particular affinity to ‘*edû* clauses’), the use of *ša* as a complementizer entails one major syntactic change. For the first time a verb other than *edû* ‘to know’ is attested in the main clause: *amāru* ‘to see’. See (4), the only attestation in Neo-Babylonian so far.²⁹

- (4) SAA 18, 117: r.9–12; letter, undated (seventh century BC)
mi-na-a ina di-me-ku-nu, ta-ka-la it-ti-k[u-nu], 1 qa ninda^{meš} lu-kul **a-mur**, šá lugal be-lí-i[a], re-man-nu-ú š[u-ú] ‘What do you eat for your health? I will eat one *qû* of bread with you. (Then) I **shall see that** the king, my lord, is merciful.’³⁰

In addition, the ‘as you know’ construction is now predominantly construed without the particle *umma*. See (5).

- (5) SAA 18, 132: r.7–10; letter, undated (seventh century BC)
 [k]i-i **áš-mu-ú** 1 + en ri-kis-su-nu, «ù^ˀ 1 + en tē-en-šú-nu, «ù^ˀ mim-ma šá la a-ḥa-meš, [u]l ip-pu-šú ‘As I have heard, they have one resolve and one intention, and they do not do anything separately.’

3.b. Complement clauses during the Late Babylonian subphase

²⁸ Deutscher 2000: 97.

²⁹ The ‘*ša* clause’ which features in ABL 1120: r.3–7 (= SAA 18, 132) is not a complement clause, but a relative clause (pace Dietrich 1968: 95).

³⁰ The preterite is employed to express a wish in the main clause. See Streck 1995: II § 25.

In the Late Babylonian letters there is a clear shift in favour of the complementizer *ša*, i.e., the complementizer *ša* becomes widespread, entailing further syntactic changes. First, the new complementizer *ša* is now construed with numerous verbs in the main clause, including *edû*. *Kī*, on the other hand, still occurs only with the verb *edû* ‘to know’. Second, a complement clause may also be dependent on a main clause with a permansive. If so, such a clause may function as the subject of the verb as well – an innovation that is peculiar to the Late Babylonian subphase. And third, verbs of perception and speech reappear in the context of complementation. As already noted, such clauses are always introduced by the complementizer *ša*. In (6)–(9) the older ‘verb plus direct speech’/ ‘as you know’ construction is replaced by the pattern *main clause with verb of perception/speech – complementizer – complement clause*. With the exception of (4) such constructions are completely absent in the older letters from Nippur and Nineveh.

- (6) YOS 3, 8: 11–12; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
at-ta^d + en *i-mu-ru šá lu ma-a-du, sa-ma-ak-ka* ‘You, (my) lord^{sic}, **may see that** I am forced to be unemployed!’
- (7) YOS 3, 52: 5–8; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
a-kan-na, ta-ta-mar-a, *šá šuk.ḫi.a ina pa-ni*, ^{lu}*érin*^{mes} *ia-a-nu* ‘You **have seen** here (yourself) **that** there are no rations for the workers.’
- (8) Gehlken 1995, Nr. 1: 16–19; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
a-kan-na, al-te-me, šá ina ^{im}*dub*, *áš-ba-tu-nu* ‘I **have heard** here **that** you witnessed (the drafting of) the tablet.’
- (9) YOS 3, 79: 22–24; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
šá 1 pi zú.lum.ma, a-na 1 gín kù.babbar ina unug^{ki}, *iq-ta-bu-ú-na-a-šú* ‘They **told us that** (the price of) one *pānu* of dates was one shekel of silver in Uruk.’

Aside from verbs of speech and perception, verbs of state and mental state are attested as well. See (10)–(11) and (12)–(13) respectively. See (14) for an example of the proving verb *kunnu* ‘to prove/testify’. Generally speaking, it seems that the choice of the verb in the main clause becomes gradually freer, since several of these verbs occur for the first time in the context of complement clauses.

- (10) YOS 21, 96: 4–6; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
^d + ag *ki-i la ba-^rnu-ú*, *šá a-na ka-pa-du* ^r*kaskal*^r.min *a-na, gir*^{ll}-*i-ni taš-^rku^r-nu* ‘By Nabû, **it is indeed a good thing that** you dispatched us quickly!’
- (11) CT 22, 224: 7–10; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
pa-ni-ka ma-ḫi-ri, šá ina gissu-ka, a-na ka-a-^ria-a-nu ^r*a-na-ku* ‘Does it **please you that** I am constantly under your patronage?’
- (12) BIN 1, 83: 12–15; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
^r*pa-an šá en-ia, la i-bé-^ri-šu, šá še-e-nu i-ku-šá* ‘My lord **should not be angry that** the sheep were delayed.’
- (13) CT 22, 6: 7–8; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
na-^rqut-ta-a la ta-ri-šá-a, *šá tè-ma-a la ta-šá-ma-a* ‘You **must not be worried about me that** you do not hear my report.’
- (14) YOS 6, 134: 1–6; legal document, 546 BC
ina u₄-mu ^{lu}*mu-kin-nu it-tal-kam-ma, a-na PN₁* ^{lu}*qal-la šá PN₂, uk-tin-nu šá*
^{anše*}*a*.ab.ba (...), (...), ul-tu* ^{kur}*te-ma-a ú-tir-ra-am-ma, a-na kù.babbar id-di-nu*
(...) ‘Whenever a witness comes and **proves** against PN₁, the slave of PN₂, **that** he brought back the camel (...) from Tayma and sold (it) (...)’³¹

³¹ Coll. B. Janković.

However, one has to concede that at least verbs of perception and speech are only used occasionally, while direct speech and the ‘as you know’ construction remain the most common strategies in that context. On the latter see (15).

- (15) UET 4, 185: 4–6; letter, undated (late seventh century BC)
ki-i áš-mu-ú^{gis} mes.má.gan.na šu-ú šá ... *ina pa-ni ad-ia i-ba-áš-ši* ‘As I have heard, that Magan tree which ... is (still) at my father’s disposal.’
 (~ I have heard that ...)

The examples given above concisely outline the developments between the eighth and the sixth century BC. As has been noted above (see section 2), textual material after the second regnal year of Xerxes (485–465 BC) becomes increasingly rare, especially as far as letters are concerned (see Appendix 2).³² However, in late and very late texts complement clauses are attested in sufficient numbers to form a reasonably accurate picture of their further development.

- (16) PBS 2/1, 126: 10’–13’; legal document, 418 BC
ina u₄-mu P[N]₁, la uk-tal-lim šá PN₂ u^{lú} dumu^{meš} é^{meš}-šú, še.numun^{meš} mu^{meš} {x} kul-lu-u’ 3 ma.na kù.babbar, šá ina GN la-igi PN₂ iš-šú-u ‘On the day PN₁ cannot prove that PN₂ and the members of his household had rented these fields, they shall take three minas of silver which is at the disposal of PN₂ in GN.’
- (17) TBER 69 (AO 18899): 29–31; private letter, undated (~ 394–366 BC)³³
ul ba-na, šá dib-bi šá lib-bu-ú a-ga-a taš-pur ik-kib’ šá^d + en.líl, šu-ú ‘It is not favourable that you sent a complaint like this. (This) is an abomination to Enlil!’
- (18) CT 51, 72: 5–16; private letter, undated (~ 148 BC)
a-na muḥ-ḥi nu-dun-nu-ú šá (...), qa-ba-an-na-šú, šá ina^{iti} gan ud.16.kam mu.164.kam, ina mu-kin-nu lugal šá^{lú} e^{ki}.meš, i-tu-ur-ru ‘Concerning the dowry of (...) we were told that on the 16th of the month Kislimu of the year 164 (the desired facts) were (entered) in the royal ledger for the Babylonians.’³⁴
- (19) CT 51, 72: 16–19; private letter, undated (~ 148 BC)
^d + en u^d + ag, *ina lib-bi šá en-ia li-iš-ku-nu-u’, šá ina qer-bi gaba.ri-ú, tu^ḥ-še-bil-lu* ‘Bēl and Nabū may persuade my lord that you send (us) a copy thereof.’
- (20) CT 49, 144: 13–14; ‘protocol’, undated (~ 118 BC)³⁵
^ḥul^ḥ-te^ḥ-mi^ḥ-i^ḥ-da^ḥ-na^ḥ-a^ḥ-šú^ḥ ḥ^ḥá^ḥ ma^ḥ-la^ḥ na-šar, ḥ^ḥna-šar ma-šu^{*ḥ}-ú^ḥ ‘He informed us that he is capable of conducting astronomical observations.’

Examples (16)–(20) illustrate familiar structures combined with innovations so far unattested so far. For example, the verb in the main clause is no longer confined to a limited set of verb classes, as is proven by the verbs employed in (16), (19) and (20). And in (16) the complement clause itself is embedded in a subordinate clause. Also note that the older complementizer *kī* is no longer attested. This, however, is apparently due to the absence of ‘*edū* clauses’³⁶ in the extant textual material, which might be considered the traditional stronghold of the complementizer *kī*.

³² See n. 14.

³³ The letter belongs to the Absammu archive from Nippur and is addressed to Ninurta-aḥḥē-bullit, one of the archive’s main protagonists. See Jursa 2005: 111f.

³⁴ On *tāru* see Jursa 2001.

³⁵ A full edition of this difficult text is given in Appendix 1.

³⁶ By an ‘*edū* clause’ is meant a phrase such as ‘X knows that ...’, i.e., a complement clause dependent on the verb *edū* in the main clause.

3.c. The emergence of 'new' adverbial clauses

During the Late Babylonian subphase, another major innovation in the area of subordination is closely tied to the semantic bleaching of the particle *ša*. In sixth-century letters *ša* starts to appear as a conjunction in the context of adverbial clauses. See (21) and (22) below. This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, outside of compound conjunctions (i.e., dependent subordinators)³⁷ *ša* has hitherto never been used to introduce adverbial clauses. And second, after the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian subphases³⁸, hypotaxis is no longer employed to express final and resultative actions.³⁹ In later subphases, a final/resultative relationship between two actions is either paraphrased by two main clauses, coordinated by the particle *-ma*, or is to be inferred from the context. It should be noted, however, that even in Old Assyrian/Old Babylonian⁴⁰ and later in Late Babylonian (logical) coordination remains the most common syntactic strategy in this context.

- (21) CT 22, 80: 16–21; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
ši-pir-tu₄, šá^{lu} gal šib-ti, a-na-aš-šá-a⁷ a-na-ad-dak¹-ka, šá šib-ti šá bir-ri-íd^{meš}, šá mam-ma it-ti-ka, la i-dab-bu-ub-u⁷ 'I will acquire the message of the *rab šibtu* and give (it) to you **so that** no one will litigate against you with regard to the *šibtu* tax of (the area of) Birri-nārāti.'
- (22) YOS 3, 167: 20–22; letter, undated (sixth century BC)
en i-de ki-i la ri-qa-a⁷, šá a-na muḥ-ḫi-ši-na, al-la-ku '(My) lord knows that (the sheep and goats) are not too far away for me to go to them (lit. **so that** I could go to them).'

Attestations in the early Late Babylonian letters are rare, but they appear more often in later texts. The following set of examples, i.e., (23)–(27), is predominantly drawn from fifth-century Murašû texts and gives a few variants of the warranty clause.

- (23) BM 40743: 13–17⁴¹; legal document, 481 BC
...u pu-ut PN₁, šá a-di-i til 7-ta mu^{meš} a-na a-šar, šá-nam-ma la il-la-ku {x x x x}, 'PN *dumu.munus-su šá* PN₂, *na-šá-a-tu₄* '... and 'PN, daughter of PN₂, assumes warranty for PN₁ **that** he shall not go somewhere else until the end of (those) seven years.'
- (24) BE 9, 57: 5–6; legal document, 427 BC
pu-ut-su lu-uš, šá ta nibru^{ki} a-na a-[šar] šá-nam-ma la il-la-ku 'I shall assume warranty for him **so that** he does not go somewhere else from Nippur.'
- (25) Stolper, *Entrepreneurs* no. 27 + TMH 2-3, 145: 14–16; legal document, 425 BC
pu-ut la ḫa-ra-ru šá PN₁ ^{lu}arad šá PN₂, u man-ma šá-nam-ma šá a-na muḥ-ḫi še.numun^{meš} u ḫa.la me-e ki PN₃, la i-ḫar-ru-ur PN₄ a šá PN₅ na-ši 'PN₄, son of PN₅, assumes warranty (that) there will be no contestation by PN₁, the slave of PN₂, or by anyone else **so that** no one shall contest with regard to the fields or the share of water (which he holds) with PN₃.'
- (26) BM 120024: 7–9⁴²; legal document, 423 BC
a-ni-ni pu-ut-su ni-na-aš-šú šá re-ḫ-tu₄ ina igi-šú ú-šal-lam ú-šá-ma-ad, a-na lugal ..., a-na muḥ-ḫi-ka ... 'We will assume warranty for him **so that** he shall pay

³⁷ I.e., a subordinator that is based on the relative particle.

³⁸ GAG § 178c. In both subphases the conjunctions *kīma* and *akkīma* (< *ana kīma*) are occasionally employed to introduce final and resultative clauses.

³⁹ It should be noted that a thorough study of the Neo-Babylonian material might yield earlier attestations of such adverbial clauses in the first millennium BC.

⁴⁰ GAG §§ 158e/f.

⁴¹ Edited in Hackl 2011 (no. 8).

⁴² Edited in Jursa/Stolper 2007: 257ff.

the remainder which he owes (and that) he shall not bring charges against you, ..., before the king, ...'

- (27) TMH 2/3, 204: 9–12; legal document, 419 BC
a-ni-i-^rni¹ pu-ut la di.kud u la ra-ga-mu, ša PN¹ lú dumu-é lú dumu-é^{meš}-šú lú arad^{meš}-šú, u lú paq-du ša PN¹ ša a-na muḥ-ḥi še.numun u é mu^{meš}, it-ti-ka la i-rag-gu-mu na-ša-a-nu 'We will assume warranty against legal complaints either (made) by PN, the *mār bīti*, his *mār bitis*, his slaves or the deputy of PN **so that** they shall not raise (these complaints) against you with regard to those fields and houses.'

This set of warranty clauses provides us with a well-defined communicative environment. The content and the intention of the speech act, conveyed by the 'ša clause', are always the same, albeit the syntactic function of the particle *ša* may differ. The examples (23), (25) and (27) are ambiguous in that the 'ša clause' could either be interpreted as a relative or an adverbial clause (final/resultative), i.e., 'PN₁ assumes warranty for PN₂ **who** shall not go somewhere else' vs. 'PN₁ assumes warranty for PN₁ **that** he shall not go somewhere else'. The opposite holds true for (24) and (26) wherein *ša* clearly does not perform the function of a relative particle.⁴³ This 'bridging context' in which both interpretations describe essentially the same situation neatly illuminates the reanalysis⁴⁴ of the relative particle *ša*: the grammatical category changes (relative particle > conjunction/subordinator), but word-order and morphology of the particle remain unaffected.

Like (24) and (26), the examples given below, (28)–(31), illustrate the use of *ša* as a conjunction in adverbial clauses. Note that these examples have been collected from late and very late texts.

- (28) YOS 21, 155: 28–29; private letter, undated (~ 394–366 BC)⁴⁵
at-tu-[nu a]p-qit-tú ép-ša-a' ša¹ dib-bi gab-bi, a-na m[uḥ]-ḥi la i-tur-ru-u' 'Issue an authorisation **so that** there will be absolutely no complaint in this respect.'⁴⁶
- (29) *BaM Beih.* 2, 113: 23–25; private letter, undated (~ 192–162 BC)⁴⁷
en-na a-ga-a, qī-ri-ba-a a-na muḥ-ḥi ad-šú, ša a-ni-ni a-su-us-su¹ ni-ip-pu-uš¹ 'Now, address his father **so that** we may take care of his medical treatment.'
- (30) BOR 4, 132: 14–23; 'protocol', undated (~ 127 BC)
en-na a-ga-a i-ba-áš-ši, [P]N₁ u PN₂ lú a^{meš}-šú, [ša] ma-la na-sa-ri ša na-šar ma-su-ú, [ša] la-igi in-da-raq ina pa-ni PN₃ an-na-^ra¹, u lú e^{ki.meš} lú ukkin ša é.sag.gíl, ša ta u₄-mu an-na-a ša mu.an.na-us-su, 2 ma.na kù.babbar šuk.ḥi.a PN₄ a₄¹, lú ad-šú-nu a-na PN₁ u PN₂, ta ḥi-ših-ti-ni ni-nam-din-nu lib-bu-ú, mim-ma ša PN₄ lú ad-šú-nu iš-šú-ú 'Now, indeed there are PN₁ and PN₂, his sons, [who] are capable of making astronomical observations (and) [who] therefore have *proven themselves worthy* before the aforementioned PN₃ and the assembly of Esangila **so that** from this day onwards we will give PN₁ and PN₂ two minas of silver per year, the allowance of the said PN₄, their father, from our supplies, according to whatever PN₄ had withdrawn.'⁴⁸

⁴³ Otherwise one has to assume that the pronominal suffix is the antecedent of the relative clause. Though this may seem plausible from a merely structural point of view, a dependent personal pronoun cannot be modified by a relative clause.

⁴⁴ Reanalysis is a process of structural change in syntax by which forms are reassigned to different constituents or different categories. This process does not change the surface manifestation. Based on the online entry 'reanalysis' in: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*. P. H. Matthews. Oxford University Press, 2007. *Oxford Reference Online*. 13 February 2009 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t36.e2802>>.

⁴⁵ See n. 33.

⁴⁶ The term *apqittu* is a variant of *piqittu* (M. Jursa, private communication).

⁴⁷ Rēš B archive from Uruk. See Jursa 2005: 140.

⁴⁸ On <*in-da-raq*> see p. 20.

- (31) CT 49, 144: 4–10; ‘protocol’, undated (~ 118 BC)
 (...) ^{im}taḥ-sis-tú, ina ka-re-e-nu ni-il-ta-kan šá 1 ma.na kù.babbar (...), (...) a-na
 PN₁ ^{lu}gala ^{lu}dub.sar ud.an.^d + en.líl.lá, a šá PN₂ nu-ul-te-zi-zu ‘(...) together we
 had drawn up a memorandum **that** we had assigned one mina of silver (...) to
 PN₁, son of PN₂, the kalû-priest and *Enūma Anu Enlil scribe*.⁴⁹

Note that ša always introduces adverbial clauses – an alternative interpretation as relative clause is not possible. We may therefore conclude that in Late Babylonian some adverbial clauses (final/resultative) started out as relative clauses with ša in apposition to an antecedent noun (i.e., noun – ša – relative clause). In combination with particular ‘bridging contexts’ – like to one outlined above –, these collocations led to the development of the adverbial conjunction ša.

4. Aramaic influence?

Even though Aramaic documentation is notoriously scarce in the first millennium BC (especially as far as Mesopotamia proper is concerned), Aramaic was arguably the dominant vernacular of Babylonia by the time the Late Babylonian texts under consideration were drafted. This is bolstered by a variety of evidence, especially by the onomastic record, epigraphic sources and cuneiform texts which give a large number of direct and indirect references to the use of Aramaic in both the official and private spheres.

Thus, the question is raised as to whether the linguistic developments outlined above (see section 3), i.e., the continuous development of complement clauses and the emergence of adverbial clauses introduced by ša, were encouraged by contact with Aramaic or occurred independently in Akkadian.

Needless to say, the answer to this question is of utmost importance to the present subject matter. However, before attempting to answer this question, let us explore the difficulties of comparative studies between Aramaic and Akkadian.⁵⁰ First, the Aramaic documentation at our disposal (especially before the fifth century BC) is not only very limited in general, but also marked by an inevitable bias, since the bulk of the provenanced material stems from Egypt. Thus, a comparison of linguistic features within the same historical stage of the language is marred by the fact that dialect interference may have led to different developments. Such might be the case, for example, with the Imperial Aramaic texts from Elephantine which are quite likely to display linguistic features that cannot be assumed for Aramaic texts drafted in the East. But since we suffer from an almost complete lack of a ‘local’ Aramaic documentation in the East, we are forced to rely almost exclusively upon the Egyptian material.⁵¹ Second, when trying to prove that a word or phrase is a loanword or calque, one has to consider the possibility that a similar phrase might have arisen in both languages independently (the same is true of other grammatical categories). The fact that both Aramaic and Akkadian are Semitic languages with similar grammatical structures, makes the identification of borrowings even more difficult. And third, even if there is sufficient evidence for borrowing due to language contact, this does not necessarily mean that the direction of borrowing can be substantiated.

These difficulties notwithstanding, a comparison with the Aramaic material is considered necessary.⁵² But before briefly discussing the pertinent subordinate clauses in Egyptian Aramaic, it is worth repeating that the emergence of

⁴⁹ The translation somewhat conceals the adverbial character of the ‘ša clause’. However, note that the subordinate clause is not a complement clause, since *taḥsistu* is the direct object of *šakānu*. On the perfect in the subordinate clause see p. 15.

⁵⁰ For a detailed discussion see Kaufman 1974: 22–27.

⁵¹ The publication of new Aramaic texts from Afghanistan (see provisionally Shaked 2004) and Northern Mesopotamia will no doubt improve our knowledge of Eastern Aramaic dialects. On Aramaic tablets from Northern Mesopotamia see, e.g., Fales 2000 and Lemaire 2001.

⁵² It bears repeating that the bulk of the Aramaic material dates to the fifth century BC, whereas the majority of the Babylonian texts is from the late seventh, the sixth and early fifth centuries BC.

complementation is a general trend within many languages. This further reinforces the proposition that these linguistic developments are in fact intralinguistic, even though the choice of the conjunction/complementizer may have been encouraged by contact – in several Semitic languages there is indeed a general trend in favour of the original relative particle (e.g., Akkadian *ša*, Aramaic *וַי/וֹי* and Hebrew *שֵׁ/וֹשֵׁ*).

Yet one wonders why this long period of co-existence of the two languages, if not a prolonged period of bilingualism, did not result in the presence of more Aramaic items and structures in the sixth-century-BC texts. And why are there almost no traces of hybridization (e.g., hybrid Aramaic-Akkadian verb forms)? Of course, one might argue that the rôle of Aramaic as a superstratum was not as strong as is widely believed, but this is probably an oversimplification of the underlying situation. Two answers suggest themselves. First, a language shift usually requires the replacing language to have a higher social position than the language that is replaced. In the present case, however, it has been suggested that the social prestige of Akkadian was much higher than that of Aramaic, and that the latter never attained such a prestigious status during the first millennium BC.⁶⁰ Furthermore, according to our sources, Aramaic-speaking elements were in fact willing to integrate into Babylonian society (not only for economic reasons) and therefore adopted Babylonian civilization, culture and religion.⁶¹ Since the use of a language is also an important means to lay claim to an identity, it must have been highly desirable for members of the Aramaic strata to master the more prestigious Babylonian language, especially at a higher social level. This recalls the model of a *Sprache der Elite* being spoken in the urban centres by the established Babylonian families and Aramaic newcomers alike, while Aramaic clearly dominated the rural areas.⁶² Of course, this model might be too idealized, but it gives at least a general outline of the underlying socio-linguistic situation. Second, one has to keep in mind that our written sources reflect only a tiny fraction of society, because the overwhelming majority of the population was illiterate. Hence, even if we assume that the language of the letters reflects many elements of the spoken language, much linguistic information concerning the interference between the two vernaculars remains concealed – especially code-switching is likely to be excluded from written sources. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the scribes of these letters generally belong to the same cultural and social stratum (members of temple households or ‘patrician’ families).

All this notwithstanding, as we move forward in time, Aramaic influence goes deeper, extending the exchange of distinct language features. Since a detailed description of these borrowings warrants a separate study, only some preliminary and general observations can be offered here. The following list comprises a few language features which most likely result from the influence of Aramaic (or other languages?). Several of these features appear in late texts only, i.e., mid-fourth century BC onwards, and have no antecedents in earlier texts. If not explicitly stated, the observations given below apply only to the late texts. Lexical interference (see Abraham/Sokoloff 2011) is not considered.

– **târu as auxiliary verb:** in late texts the verb *târu* may also function as an auxiliary verb ‘to be’. This particular use is ascribed to the influence of Aramaic *הוּי*.⁶³ The earliest attestations can be found in fifth-century-BC texts, e.g., BE 9, 16: 7 (436 BC). However, *târu* ‘to be’ is predominantly attested in later texts (mid-fourth century BC onwards).

⁶⁰ Beaulieu 2006: 207. But note Cooper 2008: 106 who argues that “the Aramaic tale of the seventh-century-BC civil war between the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and his brother Shamash-shum-ukin, (...), and the sayings of Ahiqar, (...), imply a large and almost entirely lost pagan literature in Aramaic.”

⁶¹ Beaulieu 2006: 194.

⁶² One might also argue that Aramaic was predominantly spoken in the domestic sphere. Akkadian, on the other hand, survived as the major means of communicating at the official level. However, this model is weakened by the fact that a significant number of private letters have come down to us which originated in the domestic sphere of Babylonian society.

⁶³ Jursa 2001.

– **Calquing (Akkadian as target language):** e.g., the epistolary introduction *ultu muḫḫi* PN₁ *ana* PN₂ calques Aramaic PN₁ מן PN₂ ל, and the phrase *ina birūt* PN₁ *u ana* PN₂ calques Aramaic PN₂ ול PN₁ בין. Both examples are taken from ARRIM 4, 35f., a very late letter from Uruk (169 BC). In addition, the relative clause *ša ina pāni šaṭru* given in CT 49, 144: 12.17.22 (see Appendix 2) is at least reminiscent of Aramaic זי כתיב מנעל/מן עלא (e.g., TADAE, B2.1: 10). A thorough comparison of the extant Aramaic documentation with the Late Babylonian material might yield more such calques.

– **Word-order:** the ‘traditional’ word-order of verb phrases with the verb at the end of the clause is widely dissolved. Especially prepositional phrases and (indirect) objects occur frequently in post-verbal position. In the older material, this feature is very rarely attested (even in Neo-Babylonian texts⁶⁴). It starts to appear more often in late fifth-century-BC-texts, and becomes widespread from the fourth century BC onwards. See for example (29), CT 49, 171: 6 and 144 *passim* (Appendix 1).

Even by itself this small set of examples should be sufficient to illustrate the process of an increasing Aramaization during the second half of the first millennium BC. According to the evidence presented thus far, it is demonstrably false to designate the entire Late Babylonian subphase as Aramaized, let alone as *Mischsprache*. In fact, we are dealing with a rather slow process of Aramaization whose starting point can be traced back to the Neo-Babylonian subphase. It is not until the fourth century BC that a larger number of non-lexical borrowings start to appear in our sources, and although pertinent material becomes even more scarce in subsequent centuries, there is enough evidence, to indicate that this process carried on into the late second century BC.

Note that the ‘aberrant’ use of *iptaras* in subordinate clauses⁶⁵, attested in very late texts only (e.g., (30) and (31)), cannot be regarded as an Aramaism. In fact, the confusion between the functions of *iptaras* vs. *iprus* points towards a *sprachlichen Verfall* (at least in this respect), as von Soden would put it (compare GAG § 2h).

5. Conclusion

The linguistic evidence presented here makes it difficult to escape the conclusion that such complex developments were propelled by the influence of native speakers. Although Aramaic was arguably the dominant vernacular in Babylonia, at least from the second half of the first millennium BC onwards, it does not seem to have played a decisive rôle in these developments. Especially the fact that Aramaic influence is quite limited at the time the linguistic features in question emerged, lends considerable support to the hypothesis that they are not encouraged by language contact.

Apart from linguistic features, there are also several external factors which favour the idea that Late Babylonian was a spoken language (in contrast to the opinions outlined in section 1). Among the large quantity of letters, primarily dealing with the administrative affairs of the temples, there are also a significant number of private letters. If we assume that Late Babylonian was merely a *Schrift- und Gelehrtensprache*, solely ‘kept alive’ for administrative and literary purposes, it is indeed hard to imagine that family members still communicated by means of that language. Also worth noting is the fact that in some archives (e.g., the Nappāḫū⁶⁶ and Sîn-ili⁶⁷ archives, both from Babylon) we may observe a significant incidence of scribes who apparently completed their scribal education at a relatively low level.⁶⁸ This evidence suggests not only that literacy was not confined to the temple

⁶⁴ See e.g., GAG § 130c.

⁶⁵ *Iptaras* starts to appear in subordinate clauses marking the anteriority of the action vis-à-vis that of the main clause in the past (and not present or future).

⁶⁶ 32 Nbk-1 Xer (i.e., ~ 573–485 BC). On the scribes of this archive, see Baker 2004: 16f.

⁶⁷ 1 Kandalānu-15 Dar (i.e., ~ 648–507 BC).

⁶⁸ I owe this observation to H.D. Baker.

households and a rather small group of freelance scribes, but also that there was a class of 'semi-professional' scribes within the private entrepreneurial sphere. The latter were competent to write fairly basic tablets but were not entrusted with more complex or important ones.⁶⁹

Moreover, the possibility has to be entertained that writing cuneiform was still considered desirable for a number of practical reasons, especially in view of the long scribal tradition in Babylonia. Cuneiform was written on clay, a writing material permanently available in Mesopotamia. Writing materials other than clay (e.g., parchment and papyri)⁷⁰, in turn, required complex and therefore rather expensive production processes. What is more, dried clay tablets were much more durable than parchment and papyri, and thus less susceptible to damage or deliberate corruption.⁷¹ This advantage was complemented by the complexity of cuneiform signs. As opposed to Aramaic characters, cuneiform signs were less likely to become ambiguous or unintelligible when damaged or altered.

If we agree that Late Babylonian was indeed a living language, one is left with the question as to when it died as a vernacular language. Although it seems quite clear that Late Babylonian ceased to be a significant spoken language sometime during the Achaemenid period, there are grounds to suppose that it continued to be spoken as late as the second century BC. The development of this proposition falls into two parts. First, it has been demonstrated that the extant material exhibits an increasing process of Aramaization throughout the first millennium BC. In Assyriology, this language variation gave rise to numerous pejorative statements concerning the putative corruption of Late Babylonian. However, these linguistic traits may very well be indicative of a living status, since a spoken language is actually expected to carry imprints of contact languages. We may therefore argue that even late and very late texts which feature plenty of Aramaisms (especially after the advent of Macedonian rule) were written at a time when Late Babylonian was not yet dead. Second, owing to the fact that private letters⁷² have come down to us from as late as the second century BC, it is reasonable to suppose that there were at least some (isolated?) linguistic communities left in Southern Mesopotamia where Late Babylonian had retained its status as a spoken language.

To conclude then, in light of the linguistic developments outlined in section 3 and the external factors discussed in the present section, the entire Late Babylonian subphase can certainly not be described as a dead language. One fact appears indisputable, however. Babylonian was on the wane, slowly, but inevitably giving way to Aramaic which had, by that time, become the dominant vernacular in the Ancient Near East. After a period of prolonged language contact and transfer between the two vernaculars, it seems that Late Babylonian eventually ceased to be

⁶⁹ Other evidence for the (non)importance of cuneiform in the Late Babylonian subphase remains highly speculative. For example, the paucity of Aramaic ostraca found in Southern Mesopotamia could be suggestive of a superior rôle of Babylonian as written language (in that area). On the other hand, the accidents of recovery or the durability of ink could very well skew the picture. A similar picture emerges with sealed *bullae* (i.e., clay sealings attached to papyri or parchments and impressed with one or more seals). Although several thousand such *bullae* were recovered from Babylonian cities, their distribution is uneven. The almost complete absence of archaeological evidence from the 'older' cities (as opposed to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, whence the bulk of the material comes; here the abundance of *bullae*, together with the scarcity of cuneiform tablets, points towards the fact that texts were almost exclusively written on papyrus, parchment and leather, see Invernizzi 2003: 309–312) could very well indicate a limited use of perishable writing materials. However, here again, one should be careful in drawing conclusions from an *argumentum e silentio*. Aramaic endorsements (also termed dockets, notes or notations) are not attested in sufficient numbers (only about 1% of the Late Babylonian economic tablets bear such endorsements, see Zadok 2003: 559) to attest to the growth of Aramaic as the vernacular language and the decline of Akkadian.

⁷⁰ On writing materials (used for non-cuneiform documents) see, e.g., Invernizzi 2003 and Oelsner 2003: 294–296.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Zadok 2003: 553.

⁷² See for example *BaM Beih.* 2, no. 113 (first half of the second century BC), a private letter concerning the medical treatment of a sick person. It seems highly unlikely that the scribe used a dead/literary language as a means of communication within the domestic sphere.

spoken by the second century BC.⁷³ Aramaic filled that gap, if one existed, and Late Babylonian turned into a monolithic language that had merely limited literary status.⁷⁴ As a written language it survived into the first millennium AD, until it disappeared entirely after its 2500 year history.



⁷³ The latest known administrative texts belong to the Rahimesu archive from Babylon (early first century BC). See van der Spek 1998 and in general Jursa 2005: 75f. with further references. Although Westenholz 2007: 293 suggests a similar date for the death of Akkadian, I am rather hesitant to interpret the use of (legal and administrative) documents written in cuneiform around 150 BC as evidence for the vernacular use of Late Babylonian.

⁷⁴ The latest known dateable cuneiform text in Akkadian, an astronomical almanac, was composed in AD 75 (Dropsie College Text, see Sachs 1976: 398). References to the use of cuneiform attested in classical sources are conveniently summarized in Geller 1997: 49–52.

Appendix 1

Despite numerous previous translations⁷⁵, several remaining difficulties warrant a full edition of CT 49, 144. Note that the translation given below is as close to the text as possible (and may therefore sound somewhat unidiomatic) in order to highlight the underlying syntactic structures. The text has been collated.

CT 49, 144 (BM 35559 = Sp. III, 66)

- 1 [^{d + e}n*-^rùru*-šú*^r [(x x x)]
[u^l]ú^e^rki.meš^{lú}ukkin^r šá^ré.sag^r.[gíl k]i^ra^r-^ha-meš^r
[i]m-mil-ku-ú u iq-bu-ú um-ma ina^{iti}ab ud.15.kam
mu.129.kam šá šī-i mu.193^l.kam^{im}taḥ-sis-tú
- 5 ina ka-re-e-nu^rni^r-il-ta-kan šá 1 ma.na
kù.babbar šid-tú šá^re^rki^r u še.numun šá^{ld} + en-ad-ùru
^{lú}umbisag^{im}ud.an.^d + en.líl.lá a šá^{ld} + en-sipa-man-nu
^{lú}umbisag^{im}ud.an.^d + en.líl.lá šá ana muḥ-ḥi na-šar šá na-šar
i-kul*-lu a-na^{ld} + ag-a-ùru^{lú}uš.^rku^r^{lú}umbisag^{im}ud.an.^d + en.líl.lá
- 10 a^ršá^{ld} + ag-dib-ud.^rda^r nu-ul-te-zi-zu
u en-na a-ga-a^{ld} + en-ùru-šú^r^{lú}umbisag^{im}ud.an.^d + en.líl.lá
^ra^r šá^{ld} + en-^rad-ùru^r šá ina igi* šaṭ*-ri^rit*-tal-ku
ana gab-bi*-nu^l(text:U) ^rul^r-te-^rmi-ⁱ-da^r-na-a-šú^r šá^rma-^rla^r na-šar
^rna-šar ma-šu*-ú^r ^rù^r a-ni-^rni^r-na-am
- 15 n[i]-<<x>>-ta-^rmar^r šá*^rma-la <<na>> na-ša-ri
šá^rna-šar ma-šu-ú^r u^rni*-^rik-tal-du ana^l(text:UD*) muḥ-ḥi^{ld} + ag-^ra^r-ùru
šá ina igi šaṭ-ri šá še.numun ù* 1 ma.na kù.babbar šuk.ḥi.a
šá^{ld} + en-ad-ùru a^{lú}ad^l*^d + e[n*-ùru-šú]
- Rev mu-a-ti* ú-maš-ša-ri ina pa-ni-šú u un-d[a-á]š-[šir]
20 ana tar-ši {x}^{ld} + en-ùru-šú mu-a-ti šá ta lib-bi in-da-^rraq^r
ina igi^mni šá 1 ma.na kù.babbar šid-tú šá^re^rki^r u še.numun
šá ina igi šaṭ-ri ta mu an-nit a-na mu.an^{sup}.ras.^{na} šá mu-us*-su
ta kù.babbar hi-ših-ti-ni ni-in*-na-an-din-na-a-šú šá na-šar
i-na-^ršar^r^{im}ter-se-e-tú meš-ḥi^{mes} i-nam-din^rit*-^rt[i*]
- 25 ^lnu-téš^lMu-ra-an u^{ld}šú-dub-še^{sic}.numun a^[mes]
šá^{ld} + en-tin-su^{ld} + en-šeš^{mes}-ùru <u>^{ld} + ag-dib-u[d.da a^{me}]^š
šá^lki^dšú-tin u it-<ti>^{lú}umbisag^{mes} ud.an.^d + en-líl.lá
šá-nu-ú-tu⁴

Translation

(1-3) [(It was) in month ..., day ..., year ..., ..., (that) ..., the Šatammu of Esangila, Bē]l-ušuršu [(...) and] the Babylonians of the assembly of Esangila deliberated with one another and declared as follows: (3-10) ‘On the 15th of the month Ṭebētu of year 129 AE, which is year 193 SE, together we had drawn up a memorandum that we had assigned one mina of silver, (calculated by) the rate of Babylon, and the farmland of Bēl-abu-ušur, the Enūma Anu Enlil scribe, the son of Bēl-rēmanni, the Enūma Anu Enlil scribe, of which he (= Bēl-abu-ušur) used to have the usufruct for conducting astronomical observations, to Nabû-aplu-ušur, the kalû-priest and Enūma Anu Enlil scribe, the son of Nabû-mušētiq-uddê. (11-14) But now, Bēl-ušuršu, the Enūma Anu Enlil scribe, the son of Bēl-abu-ušur, who is written above, came before all of us (and) informed us that he is capable of conducting astronomical observations. (14-16) Indeed we have seen that he is capable of conducting astronomical observations. (16-23) (Thus) we approached Nabû-aplu-ušur, who is written above, that he shall relinquish the farmland and the one mina of silver, (i.e.) the allowance of the said Bēl-abu-ušur, the father of the aforementioned Bē[l-ušuršu], to him (= Bēl-abu-ušur), and he (= Nabû-aplu-ušur) relinquished (the farmland and the one mina of

⁷⁵ Unger 1931: 131–135, Landsberger 1933: 298f., McEwan 1981a: 18–20 (compare von Soden 1981: 294f.), van der Spek 1985: 551 and Rochberg 2000: 373–375.

silver) to the aforementioned Bēl-ušuršu who has *proven himself worthy* in this respect before us so that we shall give him from this year onwards per year the one mina of silver, (calculated) by the rate of Babylon, and the farmland, which are written above, from the silver of our supplies. ⁽²³⁻²⁴⁾ He shall carry out (everything that) pertains to conducting astronomical observations. ⁽²⁴⁻²⁸⁾ Together with Lâbâši, Mūrānu and Marduk-šāpik-zēri, the sons of Bēl-bullissu, Nabû-aḥḥē-ušur and Nabû-mušētiq-uddê, the sons of Itti-Marduk-balātu, and with the other *Enūma Anu Enlil* scribes he shall deliver the computed tablets and almanacs.’

Commentary

CT 49, 144 belongs to the archive of the astrologers of the Mušēzib family from Babylon (158–197 SE) which contains a small number of letters and ‘protocols’ of the temple assembly of Esangila.⁷⁶ The present text is such a ‘protocol’.

1. The broken beginning gives the stereotypical introductory formula which is well-known from other texts of this kind (e.g., CT 49, 147 and Kessler 2000: no. 20). The PN Bēl-ušuršu (certainly not identical with the *Enūma Anu Enlil* scribe mentioned below) could possibly be the *Šatammu*’s brother, acting as his deputy (compare CT 49, 160 and Kessler 2000: no. 5). If so, the formulary would require an additional line preceding the present one, but which is now completely broken off. In light of the date given below (SE 193), Bēl-lūmur, who also figures as *Šatammu* in BOR 4, 132 (SE 185) and AD no. -119B₁ (SE 192)⁷⁷, seems to be the most likely candidate to be restored here.

4. The text erroneously gives mu.133.kam, thus read 1 me <DIŠ> 33.

5. *ina ka-re-e-nu*: the term *karû*, lit. ‘pile of barley; property held in common by several persons’, with suffix seems to have a transferred meaning here. The interpretation ‘together’ is derived from its second basic meaning, reflecting the idea of ‘to act in mutual agreement’.⁷⁸ The same applies to other legal documents wherein *ina karê-* + suffix has clearly a similar meaning (e.g., TCL 13, 160: 14⁷⁹ (*ḥarrānu*-contract) and SAKF 135 + 145: 12⁸⁰); on the use of *ša* here and *passim* see section 3.

9. *i-kul-lu*: the form is written defectively, with a CVC-sign indifferent to the vowel (KUL for *kal_x*), thus */ikkalu/* (subordinative).⁸¹ *iparras* is used to describe an iterative action in the past.⁸² A preterite */ikulu/*, on the other hand, can be ruled out, because in subordinate clauses the scribe uses *iptaras* to mark the anteriority in the past. See below.

10. On the perfect in the subordinate clause (anteriority in the past; also l. 20) see section 4. Note that with the exception of the frozen introductory formula (l. 1–3) the scribe employs *iptaras* to describe an action in the past (main and subordinate clauses, which is clearly the opposite of what one would expect), *iparras* to describe an action in the present/future and the permansive (or predicative form of the verb) to denote a condition or state.

13. *gab-bi-nu*! on *gabbi* with suffix see AHw. 272a *gabbu* I 2d; *ul-te-mi-i-da-na-a-šu* is certainly indicating a perfect D-stem form of *lamādu*, and not a Š-stem form of *emēdu*, thus */ultemmidannâš(u)/*. Similar forms of *lamādu* D, i.e., with *e*-vowel, are attested in Late Babylonian apprenticeship contracts, e.g., BM 40743: 9.28 and 49896: 7.⁸³

⁷⁶ See van Driel 1989: 107⁺², van der Spek 1985: 548–555 and Oelsner 2000: 802–811. See in general also Jursa 2005: 75 with further references.

⁷⁷ Van der Spek 2000: 439f.

⁷⁸ I owe this suggestion to M. Jursa.

⁷⁹ TCL 13, 160: 13–14: ... *u mim-ma šá kaskal.min-šú-nu, šá il-la-a ina ka-re-šú-nu* ‘... and together they (will share equally) the entire (profit) that may come from their venture’.

⁸⁰ SAKF 135 + 145: 11–12 (join M. Jursa; see Jursa/Payne 2005: 123f.): *i-di u gi-mir-ri, ina ka-re-šú-nu ú-tar-u* ‘together (the debtors) shall repay the wages and the transport costs’.

⁸¹ Streck 2001: 81f.

⁸² Streck 1995: II § 17.

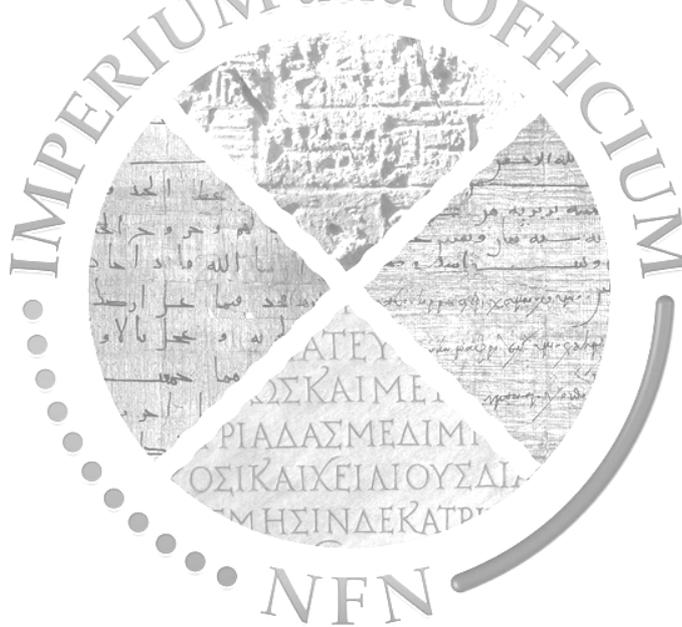
⁸³ Edited in Hackl 2011 (nos. 8 and 3).

14. *a-ni-ni-na-am*: this is the independent personal pronoun 1.c.pl. *anīni* with an obscure (emphatic?) enclitic. Possibly to be normalized as *aninnama* (< *aninnu*⁸⁴ + *-ma*, with a change of *u* to *a* due to vowel harmony?), as is suggested by the different rendering *a-nin-na-ma* in BRM 1, 88: 11. The anaptyctic vowel perhaps indicates morphographemic writing (*A-NI-NI-na-am*).

15. Although there seems to be at least one vertical wedge preceding the TA sign, the spacing of the line does not allow for a restoration of the sign ID. Note that the line contains more orthographic peculiarities: the sign MAR has one superfluous wedge; dittography of the sign NA; unusual gap between the signs ŠA and RI (apparently not an erasure).

20. *in-da-raq*: 3.m.sg. perfect G-stem (preterite Gt-stem is highly unlikely in these late texts). The form is to be derived from a root **mrq*. In the light of the three attestations found in very late texts from Babylon⁸⁵, it seems reasonable to assume two different roots (cf. D-stem⁸⁶): *marāqu* I ‘to crush fine’ vs. *marāqu* II ‘(?)’. Since it is commonly accepted that in Late Babylonian the use of *murruqu* II ‘to clear from claims’ corresponds to that of *zukkū*⁸⁷, one might also argue for an equation of *marāqu* (II) and *zakū* in the present context, hence ‘to become free from specific claims or obligations’. If this proposition is correct, we may tentatively establish the transferred meaning ‘to meet legal requirements’ and the like.

23. *ni-in-na-an-din-na-a-šú*: the form is an odd rendering of */ninandinašš(u)/*, as is indicated by *ni-nam-din-nu* in BOR 4, 132: 22 (similar context).



⁸⁴ A variant of *anīn*/_{ii}. See GAG § 41j.

⁸⁵ Apart from CT 49, 144 *marāqu* (II) is attested in BOR 4, 132: 17 ([šá] *la-igi in-da-raq ina pa-ni PN an-na-^ra^r*) and CT 49, 140: 11' ([*ta li]b^{*}-^rbi^{*r} in-da-raq ina pa^{*}-ni-^rni^{*r}[...]*). The end of line CT 49, 186: 7 (coll.) reads ... šá *ta lib-bi in-t[a ...]*. Despite the similar context, the writing <nt> (for expected /nd/ < **/mt/*) argues strongly against the reading *in-t[a-raq]* (*pace van der Spek 1985: 551*).

⁸⁶ Unlike AHW. 608b *marāqu*, CAD assumes two different roots: *marāqu* ‘to crush fine’ (also in the D-stem; CAD M/1 *marāqu* 266f.) vs. *murruqu* ‘to clear from claims’ (CAD M/2 *murruqu* II 222f.).

⁸⁷ CAD M/2 223a with further references. See also CAD Z 30 *zakū* 30.

Appendix 2

The following list gives a concise overview of published letters dating to the period after the second regnal year of king Xerxes (483 BC onwards).⁸⁸ ‘Real’ letters (in contrast to letter orders) are indicated in bold type.⁸⁹

1891	Strassmaier	8 th Cong. no. 32 (= CT 51, 72)	1
1906	Thompson	CT 22 no. 181	1
1968	Kennedy	CT 49 nos. 1–4, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 33, 35–45, 48–49, 51–52, 54, 55–57, 59–94, 96–97, 99 ⁹⁰ , 118, 118a ⁹¹ , 122 ⁹² –126, 128, 142[?] , 170–171, 181–182, 191–192	83
1976	Stigers	JCS 28 no. 24	1
1980	van Dijk/Mayer	<i>BaM</i> 2 nos. 113	1
1981	Durand	TBER 47 (AO 17631) , 48 (AO 17634), 69 (AO 18899)	3
1981b	McEwan	<i>Iraq</i> 43 139ff. AB 247	1
1982	Durand	EHE no. 447 [?]	1
1982a	McEwan	OECT 9 no. 74	1
1982b	McEwan	ROMCT 2 nos. 47–51	5
1986	McEwan	ARRIM 4 35f.	1
1991	Weisberg	<i>BiMes.</i> 24 no. 50	1
2000	Kessler	Festschrift Oelsner (= AOAT 252) nos. 1–2, 4, 6–7	5
2002	Jursa	Festschrift Walker no. 1	1
2006	Jursa	<i>Persika</i> 9 no. 5	1
2011	Frahm/Jursa	YOS 21 no. 155	1

At least seventeen unpublished letters (3) and letter orders (14) housed in the British Museum and the Yale Babylonian Collection⁹³ can be added (mainly pertaining to the brewer’s archive from Borsippa, the Late Achaemenid and Early Hellenistic Esangila archive and the Mūrānu archive), making a total of 125 letters and letter orders (13/112).

⁸⁸ See n. 14.

⁸⁹ Hunger 1976 SBTU I nos. 147–150 have been excluded, since their state of preservation does not allow confident classification. Rm 844 (= ZA 6, 230), cited in Brown 2008: 85, is not a letter. See the edition in van der Spek 2000: 441f.

⁹⁰ CT 49, 100 is too fragmentary to allow classification.

⁹¹ Envelope of CT 49, 118.

⁹² Envelope of CT 49, 123. CT 49, 182 could be a duplicate of CT 49, 123 (122).

⁹³ Among them NCBT 1969 (on which see most recently Hackl 2011: 92), dating to about 171 BC.

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