

# ORALITY, VOICING, AND INTERRUPTION IN BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN LITERATURE

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This paper unfolds in three steps. First it draws attention to how the import of Babylonian and Assyrian *belles lettres* can be affected by the manner in which the utterances are ‘voiced’. Second, it highlights interruption as a particular instance of this, proposing cases where characters are likely to be interrupting each other (the first treatment of this issue in Assyriology). Finally, it argues that the distribution of speech formulae in *Gilgameš* associates one such formula with interruption and aggression more than another.

To Andrew

*ša nagba īmuru-ma ḥasīssu atru*

Babylonians and Assyrians bequeathed to posterity a substantial body of written literature, preserved on clay tablets from the early second millennium BCE to the start of the Common Era. The most famous of their compositions is *Gilgameš*, but there are dozens of other, of varying size and genre. Much of the modern effort around these works has centred on their recovery: textual reconstruction in the first instance (clay tablets often being fragmentary), followed by philological and linguistic elucidation. But there is also a long, maturing and thriving tradition of *interpreting* these works as literature. It is to this endeavour that the present paper contributes.

With Mesopotamian written *belles lettres* we face the paradox that Mesopotamia was a largely oral world, in which most things went unwritten.<sup>1</sup> Very probably, we do not have ‘Mesopotamian literature’ – but rather the surviving fragments of the subset that got written down.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, this raises the question of how the written subset related to the larger whole, and what can be extrapolated about the latter from the former – a question which scholars have, to differing degrees, addressed.<sup>3</sup> A second issue is how awareness of the centrality of the spoken word in the lives even of literate people should affect our interaction with their written outputs. This question, which has been discussed surprisingly rarely,<sup>4</sup> is the focus of the present paper.

I will be examining the sort of interpretive possibilities which open up when one ‘voices’ Babylonian poetry. By this I mean turning a written utterance into a sequence of sounds (inclusive of intonation, emphasis, etc.),<sup>5</sup> via processes which can range from reading silently to oneself (where the ‘voicing’ occurs in the reader’s head) to a fully-fledged staging.<sup>6</sup>

I am grateful to Jana Matuszak and Mark Weeden, as well as to the three anonymous peer-reviewers, for useful suggestions and bibliographical references. It is a pleasure to dedicate this paper to Andrew George, for whose work (and for whom) I have boundless admiration.

<sup>1</sup> For a terse but powerful statement to this effect see e.g. Taylor 2007: 434.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the comment by Civil (1999–2000: 189): “I am convinced [...], MW] that, despite the impression given by the existence itself of a writing system, and by the abundance of tablets, the literary culture of Mesopotamia, at least up to the end of the OB period, was a culture of the spoken word, not of the written word.”

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. *Ibid.*: “Oral and written versions of the same composition were in principle different. Oral texts were not in all cases simply a link in the transmission of the written text, but were autonomous entities having a life of their own. Once in a while some were written down. The situation is enormously complex.” In a similar vein see e.g. Sonik 2014:

266: written mythological narratives “were at minimum different versions of, and perhaps even entirely divergent from, any living oral mythology or traditional tales from which they might have been adapted or with which they might have had features in common.” The issue is also discussed by Alster and Oshima (2007: 7 n. 44).

<sup>4</sup> One example of such a discussion is Worthington 2019: 238–41, 250–52 and 365–66.

<sup>5</sup> I thus essentially, though with different nomenclature, use the same concept as *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Whether performances of the latter type occurred in the world of Babylonia and Assyria is not a question pursued here. De Liagre Böhl (1952: 114–15) believed that Babylonian ‘epics’ were performed antiphonally. Diakonoff and Jankowska (1990: 102) suggest that a *Gilgameš* tablet in the Elamite language included a “Chorus”. George (2009: 42a) notes that formal performance could be inferred from expressions such as *luzmur* ‘I will sing’ at start of compositions.

The results hereby to be gained could have been reached with different infrastructure, i.e. without recourse to the perspective of ‘voicing’.<sup>7</sup> But since there is at least one big issue which has so far not found attention, namely the question of whether characters interrupt each other,<sup>8</sup> and since ‘voicing’ spotlights it, the perspective of ‘voicing’ has something to offer.

### General considerations

In any language, ‘voicing’ a written utterance can bend it in many ways (irony being a notable example).<sup>9</sup> But for Babylonian (and Assyrian) *belles lettres*,<sup>10</sup> recorded in a script which lacked punctuation, the potential for voicing-induced change is unusually large:<sup>11</sup> the absence of quotation marks means it is not always clear where direct speech starts and ends, or who particular utterances are spoken by; the absence of question marks can make it unclear whether a phrase is a statement or question; the lack of exclamation marks can render it unclear how much emphasis a statement should receive.<sup>12</sup>

There may have been authoritative traditions of recitation which implied where such punctuation was (so to speak) to be inserted, but tell-tale errors/variants indicate that manuscripts were at least sometimes copied by people who did not already know the story, and simply confronted the manuscript before them.<sup>13</sup>

Such individuals must have faced interpretive options similar to those we do. For example, the last line of the comic tale *The Poor Man of Nippur* reads *ḥazannu pašālatti ēterub ana āli*, which is normally translated as a statement: “The Mayor entered the city crawling.” Some ancient readers would probably instead have taken the line as containing a question and answer: “(And) the Mayor? He entered the city crawling!” Indeed, this self-resolving doublet of question and answer arguably provides a more satisfactory effect of closure than a bland statement that the Mayor entered the city.

Similarly, line 23 of the poem *Ištar’s Descent to the Netherworld* reads *izizzī bēltī lā tanaddāšši*, which is usually understood as “Stop, my lady! Do not knock it (the door) down!” This reading, however, poses a morphological obstacle: since the line is spoken to the goddess Ištar, a feminine form *lā tanaddāšši* would be expected. Admittedly, some Ištar devotees seem to have had non-binary genders, so one could at a pinch envisage Ištar being addressed as if she were male.<sup>14</sup> Another solution, which seems to be that adopted by modern interpreters, is simply to let the form stand as a linguistic oddity, perhaps supposing that the distinction between masculine and feminine forms of this type was becoming eroded at this point in the language’s development. But the dearth of

<sup>7</sup> See for example the discussion of Ereškigal’s words in *Ištar’s Descent* by Vogelzang (1990: 69), which (without referring to voicing) explores a range of ways in which the line might have been voiced: “Bottero added “doit-elle se dire” to line 33, explaining what is meant. But his elaboration is not explicitly necessary, since it can be avoided by the addition of punctuation marks to the passage in question. If one adds a query to each of the lines, they might express Ereškigal’s considerations while she is transporting herself mentally into the thoughts of her sister Ishtar. On the other hand, one might prefer exclamation marks, and take the lines as expressing Ereškigal’s almost amazed indignation. Perhaps a combination of both, as I indicated above, is the best way of taking the lines.” See also the comment by Wisnom (2023: 135) on repeated passages in *Gilgameš* IX: “The delivery of these lines in performance would of course make a huge difference to how they come across.”

<sup>8</sup> There is also the question of whether characters interrupted *themselves*. It would be interesting to know how oaths beginning with *šumma* were spoken, since, as is well known, these originated as interrupted conditional constructions: ‘If I do X (may the gods strike me down),’ i.e. ‘I swear I will not do X.’ (Something similar happens in a *second-person* address to Lamaštu in *Lam. II* 105–07, cf. the translation “(Woe be to you,) if you ...” by Farber 2014: 173).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Stanford (1939: 50): “There must be many passages in Greek drama where we miss important refinements of

meaning because our inner ear cannot detect the tone of voice appropriate to them.”

<sup>10</sup> *Belles lettres* on manuscripts owned by Assyrians were usually in Babylonian language. Specimens in Assyrian language are, so far at least, few and far between.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, from the standpoint of a would-be choreographer, their indications tend to be rather sparse: there is very little description of gestures, facial expressions, intonation, or clothing. This aspect is not pursued here.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Civil (1999–2000: 187) on lines 107–10 of the Sumerian poem *Gilgameš and Akka*: “It is generally assumed that the words of the ‘Uruk national anthem’ are uttered by Aka. It seems better to leave it to the audience of courtiers and armed men that thus celebrates the victory.” This is precisely the sort of juncture where different decisions might have been reached in antiquity.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. the comment by Mayer (1992: 33): “Die Schreiber haben offenbar den Text verschieden verstanden.” Further examples are collected by Worthington (2012: 125–27).

<sup>14</sup> As Jana Matuszak points out to me, Ištar self-identifies as a *sul* = *eṭlu* ‘young man’ in the Balaḡ lament *Urru ammairrabi* XXI 20 (ed. Volk 1989: 196). Volk *ad loc.* (his p. 217) comments that in the hymn *Šarrat Nippuri* iii.78 Ištar is said to be both a woman and a man: [*šī*]n-ni-šat mu-ta-at. That said, addresses to her as a male would, to my knowledge, be unparalleled.

parallels is again problematic. If one actually imagines the situation in which the dialogue unfolds, the urgency of the moment suggests another solution, which runs into none of these difficulties: the line can be read as containing two different commands, one in the second person and one in the third person: “Stop! May my lady not throw it (the door) down!” Babylonian and Assyrian used third-person addresses as a form of deference, so here we would have the gatekeeper forgetting to be deferential in the heat of the moment (“Stop!”), and then softening his tone with the third-person expression (with archaic f. *ta-*, perhaps Assyrianising or perhaps to make up for his tone a moment earlier): “May my lady not throw it down!” While it is hard to prove authorial intention, it seems likely that at least some ancient readers would have taken it thus.

A third case occurs in the incantation addressed to the ‘tooth-worm’.<sup>15</sup> After the worm has asked Ea to place it between tooth and gum, where it might culpably suck to its heart’s content, we meet these lines:

*sik-ka-ta ri-te-ma gir<sub>3</sub> ša-ba-at*  
*aššum annâ taqbî tûltu*  
*limḥaškî ea ina dannati rittišu*

*sikkata rite-ma gir<sub>3</sub> šabat*  
 Because you said this, worm,  
 May Ea strike you with his mighty hand!  
 (tooth-worm incantation, lines 20–22)

In 1928, A. Dávid suggested that the command in line 20 (*sikkata rite-ma gir<sub>3</sub> šabat*) was addressed to a ritual practitioner. His reasoning was this:

La proposition impérative de la ligne 20 [... , MW] n’a de sens ni dans la bouche du ver, ni dans celle du dieu, ni même dans celle du prêtre faisant fonction de conjurateur. Cette proposition n’aura une signification que lorsqu’on voudra la considérer, pareillement aux lignes 24 et suiv., comme une des prescriptions du rituel s’adressant au médecin-prêtre.<sup>16</sup>

Endorsed by the authority of Thureau-Dangin,<sup>17</sup> this line of thinking went on to become ‘canonical,’ so that recent translations render the line as something like “Insert the peg and seize the foot!”<sup>18</sup> But there are two problems with it: first, as an instruction to the ritual practitioner it is oddly placed – why not put it together with the other ritual instructions, at the end? Second, it would conjure up eye-watering images of painful and ineffective dental surgery in Mesopotamia, where less intrusive ritual means of getting rid of ‘tooth-worms’ existed.<sup>19</sup>

No doubt aware of the problems of allotting line 20 to a ritual practitioner, the incantation’s first translator, Reginald Campbell Thompson, took it as part of the worm’s speech.<sup>20</sup> Though his linguistic understanding of the line cannot be followed, the idea that it remains part of the worm’s speech looks good. Can it be salvaged?

My interpretation, which arises from consideration of what would work best as a dialogue, is that, once ensconced between the tooth and gum, the worm becomes overconfident: being well aware that extracting it is as good as impossible, it feels safe mocking its potential adversaries.<sup>21</sup> In a spirit of “Catch me if you can!,” it says *sikkata rite-ma šēpī šabat* “Drive in the peg, and (try to) catch my foot!”<sup>22</sup> In this way, the incantation sets things up so that precisely this hybris will be the worm’s

<sup>15</sup> For a recent edition see Zomer 2024: 72–73.

<sup>16</sup> Dávid 1928: 96.

<sup>17</sup> Thureau-Dangin 1939: 4 (and implicitly already by being published in *RA* under Thureau-Dangin’s editorship).

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Scurlock 2014: 402.

<sup>19</sup> See Stol 2017: 185 on BAM VI 542.

<sup>20</sup> Campbell Thompson 1904: 163: “And set me on the gums; That I may devour the blood of the teeth and of their gums destroy the strength” (*sik-ka-ta ri-te-ma gir<sub>3</sub> ša-ba-at* is rendered as “Then I shall hold the bolt of the door”).

<sup>21</sup> Zomer (2024: 73–74) interprets the worm’s question to Ea as an ironical instance of epilexis, the latter being a rhetorical question which is “intended to reproach the interlocutor in order to convince, doubt or incite him” (her p. 56).

<sup>22</sup> To modern eyes, the notion of the worm behaving thus is at least mildly humorous. Since before the discovery of *The Poor Man of Nippur* it was suspected that Mesopotamians lacked humour (!) (see e.g. Contenau 1954: 302, a reference I owe to Alex Barker), this might have consciously or unconsciously led earlier analysts away from the line of thinking suggested here.

undoing (someone reciting the incantation could have brought this aspect out in delivery). This would apply all the more if the “try and get me” line were spoken to Ea himself!

Many more examples could be cited of how the way a Babylonian or Assyrian phrase is ‘voiced’ changes the sense, and thus alters the effect of the phrase in the context of the story. The instances above are just to highlight the greater opportunity for interpretation-in-performance afforded by Babylonian and Assyrian than by writings in modern Western languages. With these considerations in mind, let us turn to the specific issue of interruption, which forms the main concern of this paper.

### *Interruption*

If one reads Babylonian and Assyrian literature in translation, one finds little or no reference to indication of interruption. Nor does interruption usually feature in scholarly discussions of Babylonian and Assyrian literature.<sup>23</sup> It is as if each character stepped ceremoniously into the limelight, said what they had to say, then made a dignified exit, courteously passing the conversational baton over to the next speaker. For many First-Millennium compositions, this impression is reinforced by the sometimes quite elaborate speech formulae that introduce characters’ utterances. But – in real life, people interrupt each other. Is communication in Babylonian and Assyrian literature artificially stately, or is the seeming completeness an artefact of our way of reading?

This is hard to decide *a priori*. Certainly, one can imagine the poets adopting a polite convention whereby each character speaks to his or her heart’s content. For real-life conversation has many other features (such as *uhms* and *ahs*) which writers of Mesopotamian languages usually exclude.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, by and large, it seems to be the case that Babylonian and Assyrian literary characters speak more composedly than real people. So perhaps they differ from them as regards interruption, too. What we need to do, then, is to look for passages where interruption of one character by another suggests itself. Interruptions can happen for many reasons, including friendly excitement. But the most obvious places to look are contexts where one character addresses another aggressively. One such occurrence is found in *The Poor Man of Nippur*, and another in *Gilgameš VI*.

### *Interruption in The Poor Man of Nippur*

In this story, the pauper Gimil–Ninurta seeks help from the local Mayor (who throws him out without helping), and then the king (who helps). Gimil–Ninurta’s two speeches, to the Mayor and the King, are introduced by the same formula, which occurs on only these two occasions in the story:

*gimil–ninurta ina maḥar ḥazannilmalku ina erēbišu*

When Gimil–Ninurta came into the presence of the Mayor/King ...  
(*Poor Man of Nippur*, lines 34 and 72)<sup>25</sup>

The use of the same formula for the approach to the two characters, in conjunction with what they go on to do, gives the impression that they contrast as examples of bad behaviour (the Mayor) and good (the King). The two approaches result in very different reactions, which highlight the contrast between the two characters:

*illil u nippur likrubū ana ḥazanni  
addu u nusku lišammihū pere’su  
ḥazannu ana mār nippur amāta izakkar  
mīnu ḥibiltakama kadrē našāta*

<sup>23</sup> One thought-provoking occurrence is George (2003: 499), describing X 72 as an “interruption” of Gilgameš (speaking to Siduri) by the narrator!

<sup>24</sup> An exception might be odd forms in the Old Babylonian poem *Agušāya*, which Foster (1977: 83) interprets as reflections of Ninsubur stammering.

<sup>25</sup> Here and elsewhere in the paper normalized after the edition of Ottervanger 2016.

‘May Enlil and Nippur bless the Mayor,  
 May Adad and Nusku make his offspring flourish.’  
 The Mayor spoke a word to the man of Nippur:  
 ‘What is your wrong, that you bring me a present?’  
 (*Poor Man of Nippur*, lines 37–40)

*etellu balti ništ šarru ša šurruhu lamassu  
 ištēt narkabtu ina qibitika liddinūnimma  
 ūmakkal ēma ušammaru izzimti lukšud  
 ša ūmiya apilti mana ruššā hurāšu  
 ul išālšu malku izzimtika mīnumma  
 ša ina narkabti tašaddihamma kal ūmi*

‘Noble one, pride of the people, sovereign glorified by the winged bull,  
 at your command may I be given a chariot,  
 so that for one day I achieve whatever I aspire to.  
 My payment to you for my day will be a mina of best gold.’  
 The King did not ask him ‘What desire of yours is this,  
 that you would parade about in a chariot for a whole day?’  
 (*Poor Man of Nippur*, lines 75–80)

While the Mayor’s reaction is to ask a question, the King’s reaction is, we are told, *not* to ask a question – even though to demand one would have been entirely reasonable. These opposed behaviours are a key element in the contrast between the two characters.

Moreover, the Mayor’s question may be aggressive: *hibiltaka* “your wrong” can either mean “the wrong done *to* you” (i.e. your grievance), or “the wrong done *by* you” (i.e. your crime). In light of the Mayor’s subsequent effrontery, it is quite likely that he actively intends to ask Gimil–Ninurta what his ‘crime’ is, nastily supposing that there is one. This presumption of criminality would be a further point of contrast with the King, who trusts the pauper.

In the light of these considerations, it is instructive to compare how Gimil–Ninurta first makes his verbal overture to each character. Both Mayor and King receive two blessings/eulogies each, but the Mayor’s are longer, and take up two lines of poetry – the King’s, only one line. My interpretation is that, when he approached the Mayor, Gimil–Ninurta intended to make a speech that began with the blessings, and went on to present his case; but the greedy Mayor, keen to secure the goat as soon as possible, interrupted him before he had even reached the end of his flowery opening. Having learned the hard way that, when dealing with powerful individuals, one has a limited window in which to put one’s case across, when he comes to his second potential benefactor Gimil–Ninurta opens with the briefest possible niceties, and moves as quickly as he can into the substance of his request.

Moreover, when meeting the Mayor, Gimil–Ninurta’s opening consisted of blessings which were syntactically complete – and therefore easier to interrupt, inasmuch as the clause end provided a natural point for a would-be-interrupter to go into action. With the King, Gimil–Ninurta eliminates this discursive loophole: assuming the hearer waits until the end of the first clause, the key plea has already been delivered, with the eulogy rolled into it as a flowery vocative. (This reading explains why the King receives fewer laudatory epithets than the Mayor, when *a priori* one might expect the reverse).

### *Ištar’s proposal and Gilgameš’s refusal*

We move now to another passage which is a prime candidate for interruption, this time from Tablet VI of *Gilgameš*.<sup>26</sup> Here, the goddess Ištar makes a proposal of marriage which Gilgameš refuses in no uncertain terms.<sup>27</sup> Let us consider Ištar’s speech, with the beginning of Gilgameš’s reaction:

<sup>26</sup> Edited by George 2003, with updates in George 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Abusch (1986: 143–87) suggested the passage includes a latent sense whereby Ištar actually wants to entice Gilgameš

into joining her in the Underworld. This does not affect the analysis above.

TABLE 1: *Gilgameš* VI 7–24 (after George 2003)

|                                                                |                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>[a]lka-ma gilgameš lū ḫā'ir atta</i>                        | Come, Gilgameš, you be the bridegroom!                           |
| <i>inbika yāši qāšu qīšamma</i>                                | Grant me your fruits, I insist!                                  |
| <i>atta lū mūr-ma anāku lū aššatka</i>                         | You shall be my husband and I will be your wife!                 |
| <i>lušašmidka narkabti uqnī u ḫurāši</i>                       | Let me harness for you a chariot of lapis lazuli and gold,       |
| <i>ša magarruša ḫurāšum-ma elmēšu</i>                          | whose wheels are gold and whose horns are amber.                 |
| <i>qarnāša</i>                                                 |                                                                  |
| <i>lū šamdāta ūmī kudānū rabūti</i>                            | You shall have in harness “storm-lions,” huge mules.             |
| <i>ana bitini ina sammāt erēni erba</i>                        | Come into our house with scents of cedar!                        |
| <i>ana bitini ina erēbika</i>                                  | When you come into our house,                                    |
| <i>sippu arattū linaššiqū šēpika</i>                           | doorway and throne shall kiss your feet.                         |
| <i>lū kamsū ina šaplika šarrū kabtūtu u rubū</i>               | Kings, courtiers and nobles shall be bowed down beneath you,     |
| <i>[kala<sup>28</sup>] iḫit šadī u māti lū našūnikka biltu</i> | Produce of mountain and lowland they shall bring you as tribute! |
| <i>enzētuka takši laḫrātuka tu'āmī līlīdā</i>                  | Your nanny goats shall bear triplets and your ewes twins,        |
| <i>mūrka ina [b]ilti parā libā'</i>                            | your donkey foal under load shall outpace a mule.                |
| <i>sisūka ina narkabti lū šaruḫ lasāmu</i>                     | At the chariot your horse shall gallop majestically,             |
| <i>[a]lapka ina nīri šanina ay irši</i>                        | at the yoke your ox shall acquire no rival.                      |
| <i>[gilgameš] pāšu ṭpuš-ma iqabbi</i>                          | [Gilgameš] opened his mouth to speak,                            |
| <i>[izakkar] ana rubūti ištār</i>                              | [saying] to the lady Ištār:                                      |
| <i>[ultu-ma anāk]u(?) ana kāši aḫḫ[āz]uki</i>                  | ‘[If indeed I were] to take you in marriage,                     |

Let us consider the structure of Ištār’s offer. She begins by stating what she wants, i.e. making the actual proposal of marriage. Then she sets about trying to make the proposition attractive. With a self-confident style, she doesn’t expressly voice a condition (“If you will marry me, ...”) but this is implicit: she plunges into a forecast of what will follow if her proposal is accepted.

Her first concerns seem to be feasibility – a problem solved by the chariot: since the next item is about entering “our” house, the chariot is presumably the one which would take Gilgameš there. And indeed throughout the poem Gilgameš, though part-god, seems to live firmly in the sublunary world. The question of how he could access the goddess’s dwelling is, therefore, a practical one (compounded by the fact that Mesopotamian gods and mortals did not normally intermarry), to which Ištār provides the solution: her more-than-natural-sounding chariot will be able to make the transition from our world into that of the gods.<sup>28</sup> This also explains why they chariot is (as seems to be the case) for Gilgameš alone, rather than for both of them: the underlying question is how he would be able to join her.

Next we learn what will happen when Gilgameš arrives at the house: amid scents of cedar, he will start to enjoy the splendid lifestyle worthy of Ištār’s consort. Once he is installed in the house (and married to Ištār), the mightiest humans will bow beneath him.<sup>29</sup> Then, Ištār moves to fertility: as her consort, Gilgameš could expect his goats and sheep to bear twins. The allusion is probably to her own powers as goddess of sex: just as her (temporary) death in the narrative today called *Ištār’s Descent* results in the ceasing of procreation on earth, so her consort may expect astonishing fertility

<sup>28</sup> Gilgameš could of course have entered her ‘house’ in the shape of her temple. But – even allowing all due credit to rituals for enlivening statues – Mesopotamians would have been aware that entering the temple and seeing what we call the goddess’ statue would not actually bring one into contact with the moving, breathing goddess (my thinking about this issue was stimulated by the Cambridge PhD dissertation of George Heath-Whyte).

<sup>29</sup> Whether Ištār is truly making a formal promise or not depends on how one understands the precatives (*lū kamsū, lū našūnikka, līlīdā*). They might be resultatives (“so that they will bow down ...”), in which case Ištār is talking about things that *will* happen, i.e. she is making a promise. Or they might be independent clauses (“may they bow down ...”), in which case there is no actual promise.

amid his flock.<sup>30</sup> From here, Ištar moves to how other animals will be outstandingly powerful: the foal, the horse and the ox will all be outstanding in what they do for humans.

The transitions between these different themes do not seem abrupt, because they are linked by thematic continuities. Indeed, we have the impression of Ištar's mind jumping from topic to topic as she speaks: starting with the key practicalities of getting Gilgameš into the house, she mentions that the house's threshold would kiss his feet. This gesture of submission forms a bridge between the house and the mighty of the earth, who will likewise make a gesture of submission (bowing). Then we learn that these same people will bring him tribute, and – as we know e.g. from Assyrian royal inscriptions – it was standard for tribute in the Ancient Near East to include animals. Thus Ištar moves to animals, first promising heightened fertility among them, and then (still staying with the subject of animals) that Gilgameš's equids will be unusually powerful.

Her speech can thus be summarized with the following diagram:

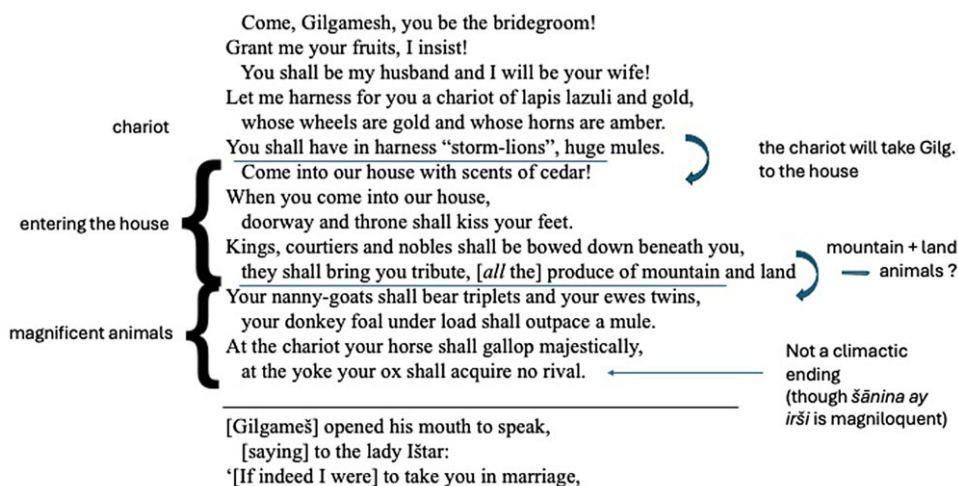


Fig. 1. Diagram of Ištar's speech, using the translation in George (2003)

This patchwork of topics, bridged though it is by continuities of various kinds, does not give the impression of a speech which has built up to a rhetorical climax. The last thing we hear is that Gilgameš's ox will have no rival (in ploughing). Of all the promises Ištar might make, especially after the magnificent chariot and courtseying kings, this does not sound like the most alluring. Nor does it seem a particularly effective note to end on in terms of persuading a potentially reluctant bridegroom.

Contrast a similar speech in *Nergal and Ereškigal* (Amarna version):

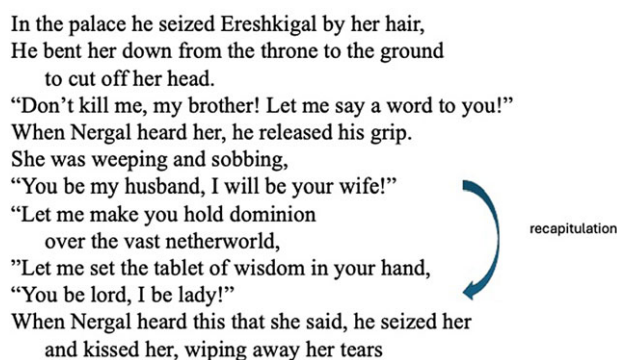


Fig. 2. Diagram of passage containing Ereškigal's speech, as translated by Foster (1996: I, 414)

<sup>30</sup> Since, by tradition, Ištar had no children, these are something the Poet did not build into the marriage offer.

Here too we have a proposal of marriage. But, even though it is much shorter than Ištar's equivalent, we have exactly the sort of recapitulation one might expect for added rhetorical power.

One can, then, make a good case that Ištar has not yet finished making her marriage proposal, and that Gilgameš interrupted her. It would make sense for this to be triggered by Ištar's mention of the foal, the horse and the ox. A point Gilgameš will go on to make in his rude refusal is that Ištar has treated previous animal lovers – including the *allallu* bird, the lion and the horse – very badly. Her promising (or giving the impression she is promising) that the foal, horse and ox will be in thrall to Gilgameš could have reminded Gilgameš of her unfortunate lovers, prompting him to cut in with his own invective.

#### *Interruption and speech formulae: Gilgameš as a case study*

Comparison of the content of our two speeches (Gimil–Ninurta to Mayor, Ištar to Gilgameš) with their context has suggested what should have been obvious all along – that characters in Babylonian narrative can interrupt each other. And there are many further contexts where the issue could be explored (starting with disputation poems and the *Dialogue of Pessimism*). But, if this is so, do we really have no hint of it? The present section will argue that, at least in *Gilgameš*, we do: speech formulae.<sup>31</sup>

Direct speech in Babylonian and Assyrian literature can be introduced in many ways. The most economical of all is for two characters' words to follow on from each other.<sup>32</sup> Usually, however, we get more than this: at a minimum, a verb of speech; and, often, longer recurring phrases which are usually referred to as 'speech formulae'.

#### *History of research*

Babylonian and Assyrian speech formulae were first studied *in extenso* in 1940, by Franz Sonnek. Surveying a wide gamut of compositions from different periods, Sonnek studied which formulae occurred in which compositions, and presented two main results: **a)** the formula *X pāšu tpuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana Y* "X opened his mouth to speak, saying to Y" tended to be characteristic of the First Millennium BC rather than the Second; **b)** earlier compositions tended to be uniform in their use of formulae, suggesting to Sonnek that when different formulae co-occur in the same composition this is likely to reflect redactorial intervention.<sup>33</sup> He also commented that Old Babylonian compositions tend to use formulae more sparingly than later ones.<sup>34</sup>

One of Sonnek's assumptions is worth highlighting: that the distribution of speech formulae is independent of the narrative's content.<sup>35</sup> This assumption seems largely to have carried through to the present day, since there have apparently been no attempts to match different formulae to different 'moods' in the narrative.

In 1974, Babylonian speech formulae were discussed by Karl Hecker in his book on 'epic'. Hecker made a number of comments and updates to Sonnek's work. One of his most interesting ideas was that instead of classifying each different formulation as a formula in its own right, it makes sense to see similar formulae as being variations of each other, produced with a certain amount of flexibility.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Another obvious candidate for consideration is scribal rulings (i.e. horizontal lines drawn between lines of cuneiform text). However, though there may well have been specific interpretive traditions in which a ruling at the end of a speech was understood to signify that the speaker had been cut off, this is not a situation I think can be convincingly argued for in relation to the poem's manuscripts as a whole. For the reader's convenience, rulings (when present) are reported in the Appendix.

<sup>32</sup> Vogelzang (1990: 60) calls these cases where "one speech itself forms the introduction to another."

<sup>33</sup> Sonnek 1940: 235.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*: "Ohne Einleitung beginnende Reden begegnen uns in den altbabylonischen Fassungen der Epen nur selten.

Spätere Fassungen haben aber häufig genug direkte Reden ohne Einleitung." The point was also made by Vogelzang (1990: 70) without reference to Sonnek.

<sup>35</sup> Sonnek (1940: 225): "Das Formale, d. h. das vom Inhalt relativ Unabhängige, verdient hierbei besondere Beachtung. Dazu gehören vor allen Dingen die Redensarten, mit denen die direkte Rede eingeleitet wird."

<sup>36</sup> Hecker (1974: 176), observing "daß die Formel keine sterile, nur in den dafür vorgesehenen Positionen veränderliche Einheit bildet, sondern daß die Übergänge vom formelhaften zum 'freien' Erzählen in Anpassung an die Erfordernisse der jeweiligen Situation fließend sind."

In 1982, Jeffrey Tigay saw the distribution of speech formulae in the Flood story as evidence for textual history, in the tradition of Sonnek (to whom he made reference). On the basis that, unlike *ana šāšu-ma izakkar ... , pāšu ṭpuš-ma ...* is a “late” (i.e. post-Old-Babylonian) speech formula, Tigay (1982: 238–39) made the following inference:

The use of the late formula in the flood narrative in GE XI shows that this portion of the tablet underwent a particular modernization which the rest of GE XI escaped. [...] We must [...] infer that prior to the late version of *Gilgamesh*, the flood narrative was not part of the Utnapištim section and that it was taken into *Gilgamesh* from a late version of Atrahasis, one dating from a time when the late formula was in vogue.

The distribution of epithets was one of several features which Tigay uses to reconstruct textual history. It has been suggested that some of these are problematic.<sup>37</sup> His analysis of the epithet distribution will be revisited later in the present analysis.

In 1987, Ben Foster suggested that the Ninevite version of *Gilgameš* “conveys excitement by dropping the conventional poetic formulae introducing direct speech.”<sup>38</sup> The comment was elicited by the scene where Enkidu is seduced by Šamhat, but a footnote stated there were “numerous instances of this device in the poem,” and cited five examples. Foster’s comment represented an important step forward, by considering narrative *rationales* for the distribution of different ways of introducing direct speech.

In the same year of 1987, Werner Mayer followed Sonnek in using speech formulae as a criterion for dating a composition. Observing that the formula *X pāšu ṭpuš-ma iqabbi izakkar ana Y* is not attested before the Amarna period, he inferred that the composition he was editing, which contained this formula, must stem from after the Old Babylonian period.<sup>39</sup>

In 1990, the topic of how speech is introduced was taken up by Marianna Vogelzang. Rather than focussing on formulae, Vogelzang highlighted cases where formulae are *not* used, suggesting that the speech was led up to by what she called “literary patterns”.<sup>40</sup> While her main line of argument relies on a concept of “literary patterns” which is not stringently defined, she made a number of insightful observations along the way.

Vogelzang commented of speech formulae that, as well as fulfilling the practical function of introducing speech, they also had an aesthetic one: “they also contribute to the literary impact of the episodes and of the characters concerned.”<sup>41</sup> Thus she found that, “in sharp contrast with the Amarna version,” in the Sultantepe version of *Nergal and Ereškigal* “the well-considered use of the conventional formulae has as its ultimate effect the creation of a ceremonial and courteous atmosphere.”<sup>42</sup> And she suggested that in *Enūma eliš* “conventional formula[e] seem to be preferred in the narrative when the circumstances are official and formal.”<sup>43</sup>

Such observations represented an advance on Sonnek: whereas he saw no connection between formulae and a composition’s content, Vogelzang viewed the presence or absence of formulae as correlating with different moods. (She did not, however, enquire whether, within a composition, different moods might be served by different formulae).

Vogelzang also drew a more detailed contrast across compositions than Sonnek had done, pointing out that while the Amarna version of *Nergal and Ereškigal* has *no* speech formulae, in *Erra* there is *always* at least a verb of speaking, and often a fully-fledged formula.<sup>44</sup> She also generalised Foster’s idea, extending it to Babylonian literature at large (though citing no extra examples): “It also seems that when the situation in the development of a story becomes rather emotional, scribal preference is to avoid the conventional formulae.”<sup>45</sup>

In 2014, Andrew George and Farouk Al-Rawi suggested that changes in speaker between Enkidu and Gilgameš in Tablet V of *Gilgameš* are marked by (vocative) *ibrī* “my friend” at the start of lines.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See Worthington 2019: 103–105.

<sup>38</sup> Foster 1987: 24.

<sup>39</sup> Mayer 1987: 67 with his n. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Vogelzang (1990: 51): “literary patterns which lead to direct speech.”

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, with ref. to Foster’s p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Rawi and George 2014: 84 *ad* 35–50.

In 2017, Enrique Jiménez found a new pattern within the Babylonian disputation poem *Ox and Horse*: different formulae are used to introduce speech by the two main characters (Jiménez 2017: 93).

There is thus a long tradition of studying Babylonian/Assyrian speech formulae.<sup>47</sup> The present paper will add an extra dimension, which relates to the above-discussed issue of interruption.

*Speech formulae and interruption/aggression*

If we consider the two main speech formulae in *Gilgameš* (Standard Version), it transpires that there is a fairly good correlation between which formula is used and how likely the relevant character is to be interrupting and/or speaking in hostile fashion:<sup>48</sup>

TABLE 2:

|                                                 | <i>pāšu ṭpuš-ma iqabbi ...</i>                                                                                                                                            | <i>ana ... izakkar ana ...</i>                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| hard to say                                     | V 249 (JCS line number)                                                                                                                                                   | X 266<br>XI 1                                                                            |
| interruption/hostility impossible               | I 122<br>V 31                                                                                                                                                             | I 206, 275<br>III 23<br>X 72, 149, 173, 249<br>XI 212, 231, 273, 294, [310],<br>212, 322 |
| interruption/hostility bad fit for the context  | I 134, 122                                                                                                                                                                | I 161, 215, 294<br>II 188<br>X 155, 212, 219<br>XI 8, 247, 278                           |
| interruption/hostility conceivable              | XI 36, 177, 181                                                                                                                                                           | II 230 (MS X)<br>XI 215, 219, 234, 242                                                   |
| interruption/hostility good fit for the context | II 165–166, 193, 216, 230 (MSS<br>z, ee)<br>III 13–14, 228–229<br>IV 211, 214, 217<br>V 34, 85, 95, 99, 156, 181, 240,<br>258<br>VI 22, 87–88, 92–93, 101–102,<br>106–107 |                                                                                          |

The distribution is not perfect, but it is clear-cut enough to be suggestive: the ‘*pāšu ṭpušma*’ formula is likelier to occur when the context is suggestive of interruption/aggression/hostility, and the ‘*ana...izakkar*’ formula when it is not (for discussion of the individual instances see the Appendix). This does not mean that the *pāšu ṭpušma* formula directly implies interruption. Indeed, this is unlikely, since there are several contexts where it is used that are hard to reconcile with interruption. Nonetheless, it is likely that the *pāšu ṭpušma* formula correlates with one or more characteristics (aggression, excitement) that in turn tend to correlate with interruption.<sup>49</sup> To anyone who sees meaning in the pattern above, then, the use of *pāšu ṭpuš-ma* becomes an indicator (though not proof) that the context was associated with interruption and/or aggression.

<sup>47</sup> See also the brief overview in Piccin 2022: 47–52.

<sup>48</sup> The categories employed in the table are admittedly a bit rough and ready, and they may well look highly subjective. But I would be surprised if a different study of the same examples led to vastly different results.

<sup>49</sup> How this correlates with the different literal import of the two formulae is difficult to pin down, since the exact sense of *pāšu ṭpuš* is not clear.

Interestingly, the *pāšu īpuš-ma* formula is also the norm in Babylonian disputation poems (Jiménez 2017: 93). If this reflects verbal aggression (or something like it) on the part of the disputants, it suggests that the trend identified here obtains outside *Gilgameš*. The issue requires investigation for a larger corpus.

#### *A text-historical explanation?*

Many of the ‘aggressive’ passages occur in the Cedar Forest episode. Those who follow the recent proposal by Fleming and Milstein (2010) to view this episode as going back to an original Babylonian story in its own right, to which other parts were added secondarily, might view the table above as reflecting the unharmonized amalgamation of different narrative styles (cf. Tigay above). If this were so, it would undermine the idea that the distribution of the two formulae was governed by their different connotations.

However, I am sceptical of this line of interpretation. A large part of the Fleming/Milstein argument hinges on differences in language between OB Tablets II and III. While Fleming and Milstein’s detailed observations of such differences can only be applauded, they do not strike me as compelling evidence for redactional history. For example, they see a contradiction between Šamkat’s use of *nammaštū* in OB II and Enkidu’s use of *būlum* in OB III, on the basis that “in the early second millennium, the term *būlum* refers exclusively to herds of domesticated animals,” and not to wild ones (their p. 117). But the term *būlum* is not often attested in Old Babylonian,<sup>50</sup> so that it is hard to be sure of its range of meanings in that period. Moreover, the contexts in which it occurs (e.g. Mari letter) are, give or take intrusive lions, *a priori* likelier to talk about livestock than wild animals, so that they are bound to skew our perception of what words meant. That, in its extant attestations, *būlum* does not (setting OB *Gilgameš* aside) refer to wild animals could simply be because herds of wild animals did not much enter the field of interest of our written sources.

Further, even if we could be sure that there is a contradiction between Šamkat’s language and Enkidu’s, redaction is not the only explanation: a poet might deliberately have had Enkidu use an unexpected word for his herd, reflecting the complexity of his own acculturation and attitudes to his previous life. Perhaps once he knows what human civilisation is, he is minded to see elements of it in the herd that raised him. Or perhaps he is confused about where civilisation lies. Or perhaps he is still perfecting human speech.

Fleming and Milstein also see a tensions between reports that Enkidu was attacked by lions in OB II and III. But how seriously should we take the problem that “a lion fell upon you” at OB III 152 has only one lion, and so “offers no direct reference back to the plural lions and wolves” of OB II 115 (their p. 22)? In OB III the line is spoken by Gilgameš, and he could easily be referring to ‘the lion’ *qua* species, as we find in the ‘standard’ version of the poem for horses and lions (VI 51 and 53). The notion of being attacked by lions (articulated through a singular), and surviving, would cohere with the result that Enkidu *kalāma tīde* “knew all.”

Thus I certainly cannot disprove the Fleming/Milstein analysis of *Gilgameš*, but I also do not feel compelled to follow it. Moreover, I have argued elsewhere there are points of continuity which run through large swathes of the poem, suggesting there was more harmonization than it has sometimes been given credit for.<sup>51</sup> In my opinion, the distribution of the speech formulae is likelier to be explained in terms of the relations between the relevant characters.

#### *Conclusions*

Thinking of how our written sources might have been ‘voiced’ is a useful thing to do. It opens our eyes (ears) to the different interpretive possibilities which inhere in written texts, and to the likelihood that there was a diversity of interpretations in antiquity. Among the gamut of issues raised by voicing is that of interruption: do characters have their say to the end, or do they not? In *Gilgameš* at least, the speech formulae would likely have supplied a hint: if ancient audiences recognized a

<sup>50</sup> The Archibab database (<http://www.archibab.fr>), accessed 15.ix.2024, had twenty-four occurrences.

<sup>51</sup> Worthington 2011.

character for the two formulae similar to that proposed here, it would have helped them to form a mental picture of the interactions narrated, going some way to make up for the widespread absence of ‘stage directions’ in Babylonian literary narrative.

Whether characters interrupt each other or not is far from the whole story about how they interact. But interruption can contribute significantly to a scene, not least by making things happen more quickly: the journey to the Cedar Forest is livelier if Gilgameš and Enkidu interrupt each other than if they do not. And if the Mayor interrupts Gimil-Ninurta, this provides an even more effective contrast with the King.

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## Appendix

Here I give the contexts cited in the table above, explaining why I classified them the way I did. They are ordered by their place in the poem.

### Ex. 1., I 120–122<sup>52</sup>

ī[bašši n]issatu ina karšišu  
ana [ālik urhī r]ūqūti panūšu mašlū

šayyādu pāšu ipuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana abišu

There [was] sorrow in his heart,  
his face was like [one who has travelled] distant [roads].

**The hunter opened [his mouth] to speak, saying [to his father]:**

Here we have no hint of interruption, for the hunter apparently approached his father (or tribal elder) and is the first to speak. However, there is a scribal ruling, extant on both manuscripts (P and g) which preserve the relevant lines. It is also unlikely that the approach to the father/elder is aggressive. But it could be distraught. (When the hunter gives the same speech to *Gilgameš*, at I 147, the edition on eBL indicates that an introductory expression is used which is not a speech formula in the usual sense, and so exceeds the scope of this paper).

### Ex. 2., I 132–134<sup>53</sup>

[uštēli ina qātīya] būli nammašša ša šē[rī]  
[ul inamdina]nni ana epēš šē[rī]

labūšu pāšu ipuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana šayyādu

<sup>52</sup> George 2003: 544–45 (whose translation I follow).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. (whose translation I follow).

‘He has released from my grasp the herds, the animals [of the] wild  
he will not let me do the work [of the] wild.’  
**[His father opened his mouth to speak, saying to him, to the hunter.]**

The passage is extant on only one manuscript, P (from Kuyunjik), which places a ruling between the hunter’s words and the formula which introduces his father’s response. The restoration of line 134 is virtually certain, on the grounds of speech patterns elsewhere in the poem. As we see from the last two lines of the hunter’s speech, he has given full vent to his complaint, and there does not seem to be much else for him to say. It is unlikely, therefore, that his father interrupted him.

Ex. 3., I 159–161<sup>54</sup>

*ušteli ina qātīya būti nammašš[ā ša šēr]i  
ul inamdinanni ana epē[š] šēri  
gilgameš ana šāšu-ma izakkara ana šayyādi*

‘He has released from my grasp the herds, the animals [of the] wild  
he will not let me do the work [of the] wild.’  
**Gilgameš said to him, to the hunter:**

Here the hunter makes the same speech to Gilgameš that he made to his father. The similarity of the two passages militates against interruption. For the hunter makes the same speech (ending at the same point) to both Gilgameš and his father. If either were interrupting him, we would have to suppose that both are doing so, and at exactly the same point. This seems unlikely. Moreover, it is easy to imagine Gilgameš reacting with composure (contrasting with the more excited reaction of the father).

Ex. 4., I 205–206<sup>55</sup>

*u ša ḫarimtu iqabbû išemṁā uznāšu  
[ḫarimtu an]a šāšu-ma izakkara ana enkidu  
[dam]qāta enkidu kī ili tabašši*

Then his ears heard what the [harlot] was speaking,  
**[as the harlot] said to him, to Enkidu.**  
‘You are handsome, Enkidu, you are just like a god.’

Here the speech introduced by the formula can interrupt no pre-existing speech, for Enkidu has only just learned human language, and has yet to utter a word. Likewise, Šamḫat is clearly not being aggressive.

Ex. 5., I 209–215<sup>56</sup>

*alka lutarrika ana libbi uruk supūri  
ana bīti elli mūšab ani u ištar  
ašar gilgameš gitmālu emūqī  
u kī rīmi ugdaššaru eli eflūti  
itammāššum-ma magir qabāša  
mūdū libbašu iše’’ā ibra  
enkidu ana šāši-ma izakkara ana ḫarimti  
alkī Šamḫat qirīnni yāši*

‘Come, I will lead you to Uruk-the-Sheepfold,  
to the sacred temple, the dwelling of Anu and Ištar!  
where Gilgameš is perfect in strength,  
and lords it over the menfolk like a wild bull.’  
She talked to him and what she said found favour,

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* (whose translation I follow).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* (whose translation I follow).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* (whose translation I follow).

his heart (now) wise was seeking a friend.

**Enkidu said to her, to the harlot:**

‘Come, Šamhat, take me along!’

There is no particular reason to suppose that Enkidu is interrupting Šamhat: she has made a suggestion to which he responds. We also have a comment by the narrator that Šamhat’s speech met with Enkidu’s approval, as is indeed reflected in his taking up her invitation. There is no reason to think he is speaking from a negative place.

Ex. 6., I 273a–275<sup>57</sup>

*šanītu itamar šunata*  
[i]t**hēma** it**erub** ana ma**ḥar** i**štar** um**mišu**  
*gilgameš and šāši izakkar ana ummišu*

He saw a second dream,  
he arose and entered before the goddess his mother.

**Gilgameš said to her, his mother:**

There can hardly be interruption here. Gilgameš enters into the presence of his mother and is, as far as we can see, the first to speak. He cannot, therefore, be interrupting her. Contextually, his address seems respectful.

Ex. 7., I 291–294<sup>58</sup>

*illakakkum-ma dannu tappû mušēzib ibri*  
*ina mātī dān emūqī išu*  
*kima kišri ša anī dunnunā emūqāšu*  
*gilgameš ana šāši izakkara ana ummišu*

‘A mighty companion will come to you, the saviour of (his) friend:  
he is the mightiest in the land, he has strength,  
his strength is as mighty as a lump of rock from the sky.’

**Gilgameš said to her, to his mother:**

Interruption is unlikely here, for Gilgameš would presumably have waited until the end of his mother’s interpretation of his dream. Again, the context seems to demand respectful behaviour.

Ex. 8., II 162–168<sup>59</sup>

[...]  
[ina mātī d]ān e[mūqī išu]  
[kīma kiš]ri ša an[i dunnunā emūqāšu]  
[lān]a’ šīḥu n[aburriš]’ šarḥu’]  
*ummu gilgameš pāša tpuš-ma iqabbi*  
*izakkara ana māriša*  
*rīmat nin[sun] pāša tpuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš*

‘[...]’  
He is the mightiest [in the land, he has strength,  
[his strength is as mighty as] a lump of rock from the sky.  
tall in [stature, majestic as a battlement].’

**The mother of Gilgameš [opened her] mouth [to speak],  
saying to [her son],**

**Wild-Cow Nin[sun] opened her mouth to speak, saying to Gilgameš:**

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. (whose translation I follow).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. (whose translation I follow).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. (whose translation I follow).

The foregoing lines are lost, and the passage is extant on only one manuscript (X), but Andrew George's interpretation that Gilgameš is introducing Enkidu to his mother seems compelling. That Ninsun interrupts her son (Gilgameš) is plausible. The first two lines above are taken verbatim from Ninsun's interpretation of the dream (see above), but Gilgameš goes on to add a line of his own. It may be that Ninsun cuts him off. This would chime with a line probably in her (sadly very fragmentary) speech, which begins *šarpiš tu-*. If *tu-* is the beginning of a second-person verbal form, Ninsun is saying that Gilgameš did or will do something 'bitterly'. This sombre mood would cohere with interruption and/or reprimand.

In Andrew George's reconstruction of the next line, the speech formula is repeated, inserting Ninsun's name, before the speech begins in earnest. This would be a very unusual feature, but how to interpret it is uncertain.

Ex. 9., II 184–193<sup>60</sup>

[gil]gameš it-tu-rum la [...]  
**[an]a' enkidu amāta izakka[r ...]**  
 [amm]īni ibrī iml[ā tīnāka dimātī]  
 [ah]āka irmā [emūqī ...]  
**[e]nkidu ana šāšu-ma izakka[ra ana gilgameš]**  
 [i]brī libbī uššarripū mu- [...]  
 [i]na dimmatim<sup>2</sup>-ma iru[bbu]  
 [ir]ub adīru ana libbiya:  
 a- [...]  
 (MS X: \_\_\_\_\_)  
**gilgameš pāšu tpuš-ma iqabbi āzakkara ana enkidu**  
 MS X: *gilgameš ana šāšu-ma izakkar ana enkidu*

Gilgameš ... [...]  
**[ro] Enkidu he said a word, saying [...]:**  
 '[Wh]y, my friend, did [your eyes] fill with tears,  
 your [arm]s fall limp, [strength ...]?'  
**Enkidu sai[d] to him, [to Gilgameš:]**  
 'My friend, my heart was made to ache ... [...]  
 Through sobbing *do quake* [my ...]  
 terror has entered my heart.  
 ... [...]'  
**Gilgameš opened his mouth to speak, [saying to Enkidu]:**  
 (variant:) **Gilgameš [said] to him, [to Enkidu]:**

In these few fragmentary lines, situated shortly after Gilgameš introduces Enkidu to his mother, and probably forming part of the same conversation in which Gilgameš announces his intention to go to the Cedar Mountain, we have no less than two formulae and a formula-like line. Not following a standard pattern, the first occurrence, introducing speech by Gilgameš, is hard to restore, and also to evaluate. The next occurrence, Enkidu speaking to Gilgameš, is introduced by the *izakkar* formula. For Gilgameš's response, we have a (rare) disagreement across manuscripts in respect of the speech formula: manuscripts z and ee have *pāšu tpuš-ma*, while X has *izakkar* and also introduces a ruling. With everything so fragmentary, it is hard to analyse the wording in detail. Nonetheless, of the two characters Gilgameš is the more impulsive, Enkidu the more cautious. It would make good sense, therefore, for Gilgameš to be interrupting Enkidu, but not vice-versa. This would also cohere with the frustration which Gilgameš evidently feels – he goes on to accuse Enkidu of speaking "like a weakling". The prospect of interruption and/or aggression is, therefore, plausible. As to why the manuscripts disagree, with such limited evidence it is hard to say.

Ex. 10., II 215–217<sup>61</sup>

ašamšātu [...]  
 enkidu pā[šu tpuš-ma iqabbi izakkar ana gilgameš]

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* (whose translation I follow).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* (whose translation I follow).

*kī nī[llak ibrī ana qīšti erēnī]*

‘The whirlwinds [...].’

Enkidu [opened his] mouth [to speak, saying to Gilgameš]:

‘How can we [go, my friend, to the Forest of Cedar]?’

Gilgameš’s speech is lost, but Enkidu evidently questions the feasibility of the idea. Whether there is an interruption as such cannot be judged, but the context makes it plausible, and at least the exchange has an adversarial quality (even if Enkidu uses measured tones).

The line is preserved only on MS ee, so we do not know if MS X, which disagrees with ee (and z) in other places, would have done so here.

Ex. 11., II 229–230<sup>62</sup>

*u ārid qīštišu iṣabbassu lu’tu*

(MS X: \_\_\_\_\_)

*gilgameš pāšu tpušma iqabbi izakkar [ana enkidu]*

(variant: MS X) *gilgameš ana šāšu-ma [izakkar ana e]nkidu*

And the one who ventures into his forest, feebleness will seize him!

(MS X: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Gilgameš opened his mouth to speak, saying [to Enkidu]:**

(variant:) **Gilgameš [said] to him, [to E]nkidu:**

We are still in the conversation about going to the Cedar Forest. Enkidu has made a speech against, and Gilgameš replies, again going on to call him a “weakling”. Enkidu starts his speech by saying “How can we ...”, but the rest of it is impersonal. One can argue that Enkidu planned to bring the speech back round to himself and Gilgameš, but this need not be the case. Interruption is, therefore, plausible, but not necessary. The context is, at least, adversarial.

Ex. 12., III 11–14<sup>63</sup>

*ina puḥrini-ma nipqidakka šarra*

*tutarram-ma tapaqqidannāši šarra*

(MS M: \_\_\_\_\_)

*gilgameš pāšu tpuš-ma iqabbi*

*izakkara ana Enkidu*

‘In our assembly we hereby entrust the king to you,  
you will return the king and entrust him (back) to us.’

(MS M: \_\_\_\_\_)

Gilgameš opened his mouth to speak, saying to Enkidu:

Here we are in the assembly of the elders of Uruk. The passage is extant on two manuscripts (M and BB), one of which inserts a ruling. This may well have been occasioned by the fact that Gilgameš pays no heed to the members of the assembly. Ignoring them and speaking only to Enkidu may have seemed rude. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that this is how we should understand the passage, and one suspects it was how it was understood in the tradition with a ruling, known to us from MS BB. In this scenario Gilgameš would be scornful of the assembly. Since we hear the same speech later in the Tablet, with the same ending (at III 227), when the next to speak is Enkidu. We have the same complication as with the hunter, his father and Gilgameš: if there is one interruption, then there must be two, at exactly the same point. A difference vis-à-vis the hunter episode is, however, that we are here in a more adversarial context.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* (whose translation I follow).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* (whose translation I slightly modified).

Ex. 13., III 22–23<sup>64</sup>

*gilgameš itbe-ma īterub ana maḥ[ar ištari ummišu]  
[gi]lgameš ana šāši-ma izakkar ana [ninsun]*

Gilgameš arose and entered before [the goddess, his mother].  
Gilgameš said to her, to Ninsun:

Here interruption is virtually impossible: Gilgameš enters his mother's presence, and is apparently the first to speak. We again expect him to behave respectfully.

Ex. 14., III 226–229<sup>65</sup>

*ina puḥrini-ma nipqidakka šarra  
tutarram-ma tapaqqidannāši šarra  
(MS M: —————)  
gilgameš pāšu īpuš-ma iqabbi  
izakkara ana Enkidu*

'In our assembly we hereby entrust the king to you,  
you will return the king and entrust him (back) to us.'  
Enkidu opened his mouth to speak,  
saying to Gilgameš:

Here we are back to the assembly of Uruk. Members of the assembly make the same speech they did earlier, and their speech is once again followed by the *pāšu īpuš-ma* formula. This time it is Enkidu who addresses Gilgameš, again in complete disregard of what the assembly just said. Indeed the assembly manage to dissatisfy *both* Gilgameš *and* Enkidu: the former by suggesting that he needs to be entrusted to Enkidu's care, as if he were not capable of looking after himself; the latter, by endorsing the idea of the expedition at all. Enkidu far prefers that it would not happen.

The passage is not preserved on MS M, so we do not know if it had a ruling here, as it did when the assembly's speech was followed by Gilgameš. MS BB again lacks the ruling, suggesting that Enkidu is in scornful disregard of the assembly. As above, therefore, we have an adversarial context.

Ex. 15., IV 210–217<sup>66</sup>

*[e-t]al-du [...]  
gilgameš pā[šu īpuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana enkidu]  
ibrī ul [...]  
ul mārī ittaldū ...]  
enkidu pāšu īpuš-m[a iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš]  
ibrī ša nillakaš[ū nukkur mimma]  
gilgameš pāšu īpu[š-ma iqabbi izakkara ana enkidu]*

'They have sired [...].'

**Gilgameš opened his mouth to speak, saying to Enkidu:**

'My friend, [have they] not [...].?

Have they not sired sons [...].?'

**Enkidu opened his mouth [to speak, saying to Gilgameš]:**

'My friend, the one to whom we are going, [he is something very *dangerous*.]'

We are still in the argument about the Cedar Forest. The breaks make it hard to know exactly who is saying what. Perhaps Gilgameš's reference to "them" having sired sons means that the troupe he is taking with him is disposable: even if they all die, their sons back home in Uruk will make sure the city continues to thrive.

Be that as it may, the idea that the characters are interrupting and/or being adversarial with each other is consistent with the context. Gilgameš's ultra-short speech (only two lines) may be such

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* (whose translation I slightly modified).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, with modification of "strange" to "*dangerous*."

because Enkidu cuts him off. And indeed it is telling that Enkidu refuses to be drawn further on the sons, changing tack to the perils of Humbaba.

[Note: the examples at **IV 229 and 232** which appear in George's printed edition are from a fragment which is now known to be a manuscript of Tablet V – see the edition in *eBL*. I am grateful to Dr Geraldina Rozzi for advice on this point].

Ex. 16., V 29–34<sup>67</sup>

[*mangu iṣ*]bat *idīṣu*  
*u lu'tu imtaqut eli birkīṣu*  
**[enkidu pāšu tpušam-ma iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš**  
 [ī nit]tarda ana qereb qišti  
 [qātka pī]te-ma ī niškun tukka  
**[gilgameš pāšu tpušam-ma iqabbi izakkara ana Enkidu**

[Stiffness took] a grip of his arms,  
 and feebleness beset his legs.

**[Enkidu] opened his mouth to speak, saying to Gilgameš:**

'[Let us go] into the midst of the forest,  
 [set] to it and let us raise (our battle) cry!'

**[Gilgameš] opened his mouth to speak, saying to Enkidu:**

Gilgameš and Enkidu have arrived at the Cedar Forest, and are standing just outside it, summoning the courage to enter. Enkidu is the first to propose that they do so. Prior to his speaking we have the narrator, so this is a case where interruption is impossible, but opposition is arguable (Enkidu is effectively telling Gilgameš that he needs to change his behaviour). Gilgameš's reply would seem to carry an objection, or at least dissent, so that interruption is possible. This would also fit the possible pattern of interruption of very short utterances we saw in earlier Tablets.

Ex. 17., V 72–73<sup>68</sup>

*enlil lizz[ur-šu' ...]*  
***enkidu pāšu tpuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš***

'May Enlil curse [him ...]'

**Enkidu opened his mouth [to speak, saying to Gilgameš]**

Here Humbaba is apparently soliloquising (the speech is too broken to allow certainty). If there is an interruption, it is most likely one of narrative perspective: the camera turns, as it were, from Humbaba to Enkidu, producing an effect in which it is as if the latter interrupts the former. Otherwise, Enkidu could simply be flared up by the situation.

Ex. 18., V 85–86<sup>69</sup>

[...]  
*humbaba pāšu tpuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš*  
*limtalkū lillū gilgameš nu''ū amīlu*

Humbaba opened his mouth to speak, saying to Gilgameš:

'Let fools, Gilgameš, take the advice of an idiot fellow!'

Owing to a lacuna, we do not know whether anyone spoke before Humbaba, and whether there might be signs that their speech was incomplete when he started speaking. Nonetheless, as the first sentence of line of Humbaba's speech shows, and we would in any case have expected from the context, his speech is highly adversarial.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Rawi and George 2014: 76–77.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>69</sup> George 2003: 606–07, whose translation I follow.

Ex. 19., V 93–100<sup>70</sup>

lu[kkis ša] gilgameš napšari u kišādu  
 lušāk[il š]irīšu i[šš]ār šaršari nā'iri arê u zībī  
**gilgameš pāšu ipuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana enkidu**  
 ibrī [ša] ħumbaba i[š]ī[anū] panūšu  
 u gašrī[š n]itelā ana ašrī<sup>71</sup>šu nikaššad x šāšu  
 u libbi [i]plaḥu ul ipašša[h] a[dī] surriš  
**enkidu pāšu ipuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš**  
 ammīni ibrī pisnuqiš taqabbi

'I will [slit] the gullet and throat of Gilgameš,  
 I will feed his flesh to the 'locust' birds, the ravening eagles and vultures!'  
**Gilgameš opened his mouth to speak, saying to Enkidu:**  
 'My friend, Humbaba's features have changed!  
 Boldly we came up here to his *lair* to defeat him,  
 but the heart that took fright does not grow calm in a moment.'  
**Enkidu opened his mouth to speak, saying [to] Gilgameš:**  
 'Why, my friend, [do you] speak like a weakling?'

In this extract, attested only on MS dd, we see the end of Humbaba's speech, which promises a terrible death to those who have invaded his lair. Then we hear Gilgameš, who suddenly sounds afraid, and Enkidu, who encourages him. Enkidu is in open disagreement with Gilgameš, and might well want to cut him off before he says anything more demoralising. Interruption is, therefore, plausible here.

As for Humbaba, whether his speech counts as finished or not is hard to judge: he started with an address to Gilgameš, but quickly switched to Enkidu, telling Enkidu that he (Humbaba) is going to kill Gilgameš. Perhaps he intended to return to an address to Gilgameš, but was interrupted. Or perhaps he didn't. It is hard to tell.

As for Gilgameš, certainly he is hostile to Humbaba, and, as we learn, afraid of him. But for precisely this reason one wonders whether he would interrupt him. This seems unlikely, though his utterance can be assumed to radiate hostility.

Ex. 20., V 153–157<sup>71</sup>

išši mala taqabbâ [...]  
 luššurka asa [...]  
 išši balti ēkal[li ...]  
**[e]nkidu pāšu ipuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš**  
 [ibr]ī ē tašme ša ħumbaba q[ab]āšu

'Trees as many as you command from me [...],  
 I will guard for you the myrtle [...],  
 timber that is the pride of a palace [...].'  
**Enkidu opened his mouth to speak, [saying to Gilgameš]:**  
 'My [friend], do not listen to what Humbaba says!'

Here we have the end of the speech in which Humbaba pleads with Gilgameš for his life, followed by the beginning of the speech in which Enkidu tells Gilgameš to ignore Humbaba. Interruption would make perfect sense: one can envisage Enkidu deciding that Humbaba has had enough opportunity to plead his case, and that there is a danger Gilgameš might be swayed. Indeed, it may be suggestive that the last thing Humbaba says is that he is willing to supply timbers fit for palaces. As we know from the subsequent story, Gilgameš is desirous of these, so perhaps Enkidu judged that Humbaba should not be allowed to develop the point, lest Gilgameš be carried away.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

Ex. 21., V 249 (line number after JCS)<sup>72</sup>

[...]  
*enkidu [pāšu ṭpuš-ma iqabbi izakkar ana gilgameš]*

This formula follows directly on from a long lacuna. As we do not know what went before it, we have no way of judging whether there might be interruption, though hostility would be consistent with the Humbaba episode as a whole.

Ex. 22., V 179–183 (=lines 263–267 in JCS)<sup>73</sup>

*eninna-ma enkidu ittika šakin rumm[ū'a]  
 qibi-ma ana gilgameš napišṭi lītir*

---

*enkidu pāšu ṭpuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš  
 ibrī hūmbaba maššar qišti erēni  
 gummiršu nēršu ṭēnšu ḥullī[q]*

‘Now, Enkidu, [my] release rests with you:  
 tell Gilgameš he should spare my life.’

---

**Enkidu opened his mouth to speak, saying to Gilgameš:**

‘My friend – Humbaba, guardian of the Forest of [Cedar],  
 finish him, slay him, do away with his power!’

The passage is again extant only on MS dd. We are approaching Humbaba’s end: he makes one last desperate appeal to Enkidu, that he should intercede with Gilgameš. Enkidu duly speaks to Gilgameš, but saying the opposite of what Humbaba had hoped for. It is possible that Humbaba has said all he has to say, and simply passed the conversational baton over to Enkidu. But Enkidu’s speech makes it clear there is an element of time pressure: Gilgameš is to kill Humbaba *lām iṣmû ašarēdu enlil* “before Enlil the foremost hears about it.” Interruption is possible: perhaps Enkidu sensed that Humbaba was about to launch into (more) blandishments directed at him, and saw no point in listening to these. Be that as it may, Enkidu is unlikely to be at his calmest in this situation.

Ex. 23., V 256–258<sup>74</sup>

*ay ulabbirā kilallān  
 ēli ibrišu gilgameš enkidu qēbiri ay irši  
 (MS dd: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 enkidu pāšu ṭpuš-ma iqabbi izakkara ana gilgameš*

‘May the pair of them not grow old,  
 apart from his friend Gilgameš may Enkidu have no-one to bury him.’  
 (MS dd: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Enkidu opened his mouth to speak, saying to Gilgameš:**

Humbaba knows his end is nigh, and so has taken to cursing his assassins-*in-pectore*. A lacuna makes it unclear how long Humbaba’s curses are, but it would make perfect sense for Enkidu to want to interrupt him. One of the lines in Enkidu’s poorly preserved speech starts with *adi arrat* [...], perhaps meaning “until the curse ...”, which may suggest Gilgameš needs to act under an element of time pressure.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Rawi and George 2014: 80–81, whose translation I follow.

<sup>73</sup> George 2003: 608–09, with minor modification to translation.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

Ex. 24., VI 22<sup>75</sup>

This is the passage where Ištar tries to seduce Gilgameš, and he rebuffs her. See discussion above, arguing that interruption is at least plausible, as Ištar's speech seems unfinished.

Ex. 25., VI 84–112<sup>76</sup>

This passage is the conversation between Anu and Ištar, in which she requests the Bull of Heaven to punish Gilgameš for having scorned her. Anu is reluctant to do so, but acquiesces when she threatens to bring up the dead to devour the living. No manuscript is preserved for all the passage, but wherever a manuscript is preserved, a ruling appears when there is a change in speakers, before the speech formula. The sole exception is MS Q, which lacks a ruling between VI 112–113. The most interesting point for our purposes is when Anu tells Ištar he will give her the Bull if the people of Uruk first gather provisions for seven years:

*šumma alâ terriš[nni]  
almatti uruk sebe šanāti pî [l]ipahh[r]  
[ikkar uruk<sup>?</sup> l]irabbi šammī*

**[Ištar pāša tpuš-ma iqabbi  
izakkar ana anu abiša]  
[...] akkum  
[...] ušabši  
alm[atti uruk sebe šan]āti pî [upta]h[h]ir  
ikk[ar uruk<sup>?</sup> urtabbi] šammī  
a[n]a uz-zu<sup>?</sup> ša alê u-na<sup>?</sup>-[...]**

‘If you will ask of me the Bull of Heaven,  
for seven years let the widow of Uruk gather chaff,  
[and the farmer of Uruk] grow hay.’

**[Ištar opened her mouth] to speak,  
[saying to] her father, Anu:  
‘[...] I stored up,  
[...] I made grow.  
[For seven] years the widow [of Uruk has] gathered chaff,  
the farmer [of Uruk has grown] hay.  
At the wrath of the Bull of heaven I shall (make) him [...].’**

What is uncertain is whether Ištar has pre-empted Anu, and is able to tell him straight away that his condition is already fulfilled, so that he has no excuses for further delay; or whether it implies that she goes away and returns after the seven years, to re-present herself as having fulfilled Anu's condition. The point would very likely have been as unclear to ancient readers as it is to us. But either way, it would seem that Ištar's tone is adversarial throughout. If there is a seven-year delay, then we cannot infer that she interrupts Anu when she returns to the attack, but she would still be an obstreperous interlocutor.

Ex. 26., X 70–72<sup>77</sup>

*[anāku ul kī š]āšu-ma anellam-ma  
[ul ate]bbā dūr dā[r]*

**[gilga]meš ana šāši izakkara ana sāb[īt]**

‘[Shall I not be like] him and also lie down,  
[never to rise] again, through all eternity?’

**[Gilga]meš spoke to her, to the ale-wife:**

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., whose translation I follow.

Here the speech formula separates two utterances by Gilgameš himself. Two manuscripts out of three (K and b, not **z**) also separate them with a ruling. Though doleful, Gilgameš is unlikely to be aggressive here.

Ex. 27., X 147–149<sup>78</sup>

*anāku ul kī šāšu-ma anell[am-ma]  
[ul atebbâ dūr dār]*

**[gilga]meš ana šāšu izakkara ana ur-šanabi malāhī**

['Shall I not be like] him and also lie down,  
[never to rise] again, through all eternity?'

**[Gilga]meš spoke to him, to Ur-šanabi the boatman:**

Here we have another occurrence of the formula separating two speeches by Gilgameš. The passage is only extant on MS K, which, as previously, has a ruling.

Ex. 28., X 154–155<sup>79</sup>

*šumma lā naṭu-m[a šēra lurpu]*

**ur-šanabi ana šāšu-ma izakkara ana gilgameš**

'If it may not be done, [I will roam the wild!]

**Ur-šanabi spoke to him, to Gilgameš:**

Here Gilgameš demands to know the way to Uta-napišti. Ur-šanabi obliges, by telling him that though he (Gilgameš) has smashed the Stone Ones, he can go to the forest and collect wood for punting poles. His tone is, to judge from the context, unlikely to be aggressive.

Ex. 29., X 171–173<sup>80</sup>

*mālak arḫi u šapatti ina šalši ūme ittalk[ū xx]  
ikšudam-ma ur-šanabi mē m[ūtī]  
ur-šanabi ana šāšu-ma izakkara ana gilgameš*

By the third day they *had travelled* a month and a half's journey,  
then Ur-šanabi arrived at the Waters of [Death].

**Ur-šanabi [spoke] to him, [to Gilgameš].**

Here it seems that Ur-šanabi's speech interrupts only silence: Gilgameš was not just speaking. He goes on to give instructions for Gilgameš to operate the punting poles. There is no sign of hostility.

Ex. 30., X 207<sup>81</sup>

*gilgameš ana šāš[u-m]a izakkar [ana uta-napišti rūqī]*

**Gilgameš spoke to him, to Uta-napišti the Faraway.**

The lines before this are very fragmentary. We had a soliloquy by Uta-napišti (X 187ff.), but owing to breaks it is unclear where this ends. Perhaps Uta-napišti is still talking to himself when Gilgameš bounds up; or perhaps the narrator has taken over; or perhaps Uta-napišti has actually spoken to Gilgameš. We can't tell for sure.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

Ex. 31, X 211–213<sup>82</sup>

[xx] su me x ša x [...]

**[uta-napišti a]n[a š]āšu-m[a izakkar]a an[a gilgameš]**  
 [ammīni aklā] lē[tāka] qudd[udū panūka]

[...]

**[Uta-napišti spoke] to him, to [Gilgameš]**  
 ‘[Why are] your cheeks [hollow, your face] sunken?’

Gilgameš has just made what is very probably his first speech to Uta-napišti. It is badly fragmentary, so we do not know what its tone or import was. Uta-napišti disregards it, asking Gilgameš the same (long) question he was previously asked by Šiduri and Ur-šanabi.

Ex. 32., X 218–220<sup>83</sup>

*u pan labbe šaknāta-m[a tarappud šēra]*

**gilgameš ana šāšu-m[a izakkara ana uta-napišti]**  
*ammīni lā aklā lētā[ya lā quddudū panūya]*

‘And (why is it) [you roam the wild] got up like a lion?’

**Gilgameš spoke to him, to Uta-napišti:**  
 ‘Why should [my] cheeks not be hollow, [my face not sunken]?’

Gilgameš gives the same answer to Uta-napišti that he gave to those who asked the same question before him. Interestingly, however, the speech formula has changed.

Ex. 33., X 247–249<sup>84</sup>

*[anāk]u ul kī šāšu-ma anellam-ma*  
*ul atebbā dār d[ār]*

**gilgameš ana šāšu izakkara ana uta-napišti]**

‘[Shall] I not be like him and also lie down,  
 never to rise again, through all eternity?’

**Gilgameš spoke to him, to Ur-šanabi the boatman.**

Here we have a third occurrence of this passage, with the speech formula separating two utterances by Gilgameš. The three lines are attested only on MS K, which has a ruling.

Ex. 34., X 264–267<sup>85</sup>

*aššu yāši mēlula lā ū<sup>2</sup> [...]*  
*[aššu] yāši ḥad<sup>ad</sup>-dī-’i ū-ma-al...*

**uta-napišti a]n[a šāšu-ma izakkara ana [gilgameš]**  
*ammīni gilgameš nissata turt[enedde atta]*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

‘Because of me [*they*] *shall not* [...] the dancing,  
because of me, happy and carefree, *they will* ... [...].’

**Uta–napišti spoke to him, to Gilgameš:**

‘Why, Gilgameš, to you constantly [chase] sorrow?’

Here Gilgameš has given Uta–napišti two long speeches (separated by a formula). Whether Uta–napišti is interrupting him is hard to say. Certainly, his reference to sorrow (*nissatu*) seems to follow directly on from the last lines uttered by Gilgameš. But this is equally consistent with interruption and letting him finish. There is no sign of hostility.

Ex. 35., XI 1<sup>86</sup>

*gilgameš ana šāšu-ma izakkara ana uta–napišti rūqi*

Gilgameš spoke to him, to Uta–napišti the Faraway:

As the first line of a Tablet of the poem, this creates the impression of a new beginning. Since Tablet X concluded with a speech by Uta–napišti, one could also read this as carrying directly on. But some sort of hiatus is perhaps more likely. Either way, there is no sign of hostility at the start of the utterance.

Ex. 36., XI 7–8<sup>87</sup>

*[att]a kīkī tazziiz-ma ina puḥur ilī balāta teš’e*

***[u]ta–napišti ana šāšu-ma izakkara ana gilgameš***

‘How was it you attended the gods’ assembly, and found life?’

**Uta–napišti spoke to him, to Gilgameš:**

In response to Gilgameš’s question, Uta–napišti here tells the story of the Flood. He does not seem aggressive.

Ex. 37., XI 173–184<sup>88</sup>

*īmūr eleppam-ma īteziz enlil  
libbāti imtali ša ilī igigī  
[ayyā]num-ma īši napišti  
ay ibluṭ amīlu ina karāš[ī]*

***nin–urta pāšu īpuš-ma l izakkar ana qurādi enlil  
mannum-ma ša lā ea amātu ibanni  
u ea īde-ma kala šiprī***

***ea pāšu īpuš-ma iqabbi l izakkar ana qurādi Enlil***

Enlil saw the boat and grew angry.  
He was filled with rage against the Igigi gods:  
‘From where escaped this living creature?  
No man should survive this destruction!’

**Ninurta opened his mouth to speak, saying to the hero Enlil:**

‘Who, if not Ea, can accomplish such things?  
For Ea alone knows (how to do) all tasks.’

**Ea opened his mouth to speak,/saying to the hero Enlil:**

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, whose translation I follow.

Here we have two changes of speaker. First, the angry Enlil receives a response from his son Ninurta. On the surface of it, Enlil asks a question and Ninurta answers it. But, interestingly, Enlil did not ask *who* had saved the people aboard the Ark. It does not seem to have occurred to him they might have had a helper among the gods. His question can, therefore, be taken as an angry outburst as much as a genuine request for information. If such it was, it would very probably have gone on for more than two lines. It is plausible, therefore, for Ninurta's answer to be an interruption. When Ea speaks after Ninurta he ignores him, addressing his remarks to Enlil. This recalls the situation with the assembly of Uruk in Tablet III, where Gilgameš and Enkidu ignored the assembly's speakers, and addressed each other instead.

Ex. 38., XI 211–220<sup>89</sup>

*šittu kīma imbari inappuš elišu*  
*ūta-napišti ana šāši-ma izakkara ana marḥiṇišu*  
*amrī eṭla ša trišu balaṭu*  
*šittu kīma imbari inappuš elišu*  
*marḥissu ana šāšu-ma izakkara ana ūta-napišti rūqi*  
*lupussu-ma liggeltā amīlu*  
*ḥarrān illika litūr ina šulmi*  
*abul ūṣā litūr ana mātišu*  
*ūta-napišti ana šāši-ma izakkara ana marḥiṇišu*  
*raggat amīlātu iraggikki*

Sleep was wafting over him (Gilgameš) like a fog.

**Uta-napišti spoke to her, to his spouse:**

'See the fellow who demanded life!

Sleep is wafting over him like a fog!'

**His spouse spoke to him, to Uta-napišti the Faraway:**

'Touch him, so that the man wakes up,

(and) he goes back in safety by the road he came,

(and) he returns to his land by the gate he came.'

**Uta-napišti spoke to her, to his spouse:**

'Being deceitful, mankind will deceive you.'

Here we have a three-part exchange between Uta-napišti and his wife (nameless, but Immortal). The first of the three utterances follows on from the narrator, and so cannot be interrupting anyone. Interruptions are possible in the subsequent two, but there is no particular reason to envisage them.

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#### الشفوية والتعبير الصوتي والمقاطعة في الأدب البابلي والآشوري

بقلم: مارتن ورثينجتون

تكشف هذه المقالة البحثية محتوياتها البحثية على ثلاث خطوات. أولاً، تلفت الانتباه إلى كيفية تأثير أهمية الآداب البابلية والآشورية الجميلة (belles lettres) بالطريقة التي يتم بها "نطق" الألفاظ. ثانياً، تسلط الضوء على المقاطعة كمثال خاص على ذلك، وتقترح حالات حيث من المرجح أن يقاطع الشخصيات بعضهم البعض (أول معالجة لهذه القضية في علم الآشوريات). وأخيراً، تزعم أن توزيع صيغ الكلام في جلجامش يربط أحدها بالمقاطعة والعدوان أكثر من غيره.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., whose translation I follow with minor modifications.