Pardon My Sumerian: A Typology of Insults and Offensive Language in the Old Babylonian Lexicon
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Pardon my Sumerian

A Typology of Insults and Offensive Language in the Old Babylonian Lexicon

BA Thesis Ancient Near Eastern Studies – Assyriology

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1. Introduction

aš₂ dug₄–dug₄–ge aš₂ nu–mu–ni–in–gi₄

aš₂–e gi₄–a aš₂-a ba–ni–in–gi₄

"To a curse that is uttered, a curse is not reciprocated.
A curse which is reciprocated, will be retaliated against with yet another curse."
– A Sumerian proverb[1]

Insults and derogatory or offensive expressions, encapsulated by the term 'invective (language),' can take many shapes and forms. These verbal manifestations of denigration, contempt, and hatred are among the most universal phenomena of human communication. Their ubiquity spans through all periods and all societies.[2] Its performative or even transformative power makes insulting a tool to aggressively influence emotions and social dynamics between individuals and collectives.[3]

Textual sources from Mesopotamia in the Old Babylonian (OB) period (ca. 2000–1600 BCE) contain ample documentation of slandering, scoffing, and scorning. A large number of insults are known, as well as terms used to describe the act of insulting.[4] Some attempts have been made to collect these forms of verbal abuse, but a systematic analysis of insults and 'insulting terms' has not yet been made. The combination of these aspects of invectivity is especially important. While in most cases insults are relatively straight-forward to identify, not every ad-hominem argument is offensive by definition. The analysing of connotations that are attributed to alleged insults by means of terms such as "he insulted me thus…", allows us to establish what the Mesopotamian authors thought of as offensive.

This approach is conducted throughout multiple corpora. The OB literary corpus includes several texts attributed to the curricula at the scribal schools (Edubba) that contain large numbers of insults.[5] As these texts, known as disputations, are with some exceptions

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[1] ETCSL 6.1.01, 1.79.

[2] K. Beers Fägersten, K. Stapleton, *Advances in Swearing Research: New Languages and New Contexts* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017), 1–2; D. Ellebrock et al., "Invektivität: Perspektiven eines neuen Forschungsprogramms in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften." *Kulturwissenschaftliche Zeitschrift* 2, no. 1 (2017), 4–5.

[3] Ellebrock et al., *ibid*.

[4] The CAD characterizes some words as having an "invective" application: *ardu, ellu, gallû, ḫabbātu (mār ḫabbāti), ḫarīmtu, ḫatû, ilittu (ilitti asakki), kalbu, libittu, qutû, zēr ḫalgatî.* For an enumeration of insulting terms, see page 26.

[5] For a comprehensive overview of the Edubba curriculum as a whole, see E. Robson, "The Tablet House: A Scribal School in Old Babylonian Nippur," RA 93, no. 1 (2001), 39–66.

written in Sumerian and are part of a tradition that reaches back into the third millennium BCE when that language was still spoken, these might not be representative of the use of swearwords in daily life in the OB period.[6] Therefore, this study incorporates insults and insulting terms from personal and professional correspondences as well.[7]

Though this research field is extensive, literature is sparse. Therefore, this thesis is modelled after a feasibility report, which has the capability of forming the basis for further research and case studies. The bulk of the study consists of a typology of invectives from the aforementioned corpora, collected in a database where the entries are categorised according to the genre of their source text, language, syntax, as well as several offensive traits. The results and patterns that this typology exhibits are only interpreted to a limited extent, and serve as a preliminary first step in identifying more complex research questions that deserve future studies of their own. I attempt to direct this discussion into the realms of intertextuality[8] and versatility of the material, examining how the study of invective language in Old Babylonian literary and non-literary texts can facilitate further socio-cultural contextualisation of the Mesopotamian literary tradition. The database itself is accessed via my Academia.edu account and will be referenced throughout this thesis using the ID numbers of the entries in italics (e.g. *l_475*).[9]

After a brief inspection of the status of invectivity-related research, which will provide this study with the necessary theoretical framework, the typology and its methodology will be detailed in the second section. Next, patterns and results are collected and presented in the third section before continuing with their interpretation in section four. Only those interpretations inherent to the typology itself will be discussed here, as the fifth section concerns itself with the research opportunities that result from them with respect to questions of morality, efficacy, and ambiguity of the source material.

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[6] The term 'disputation' has a rather strict application as it directly reflects the Sumerian term a d a m i n. In this thesis, the terms 'disputation' and 'dialogue' will be used interchangeable, whereas the term 'diatribe' refers to monologues.

[7] R. Frankena, et al. *Altbabylonische Briefe,* 14 vols (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1965ff); W. Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, with Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, MC 12 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

[8] Here understood to be the phenomena of cross-referencing between sources, as well as shared references to other texts.

[9] https://www.academia.edu/62726560/Pardon_my_Sumerian_A_Typology_of_Insults_and_Offensive_Language_in_the_Old_Babylonian_Lexicon_Database.

1.1. Historiographical Framework

"Swearing research" has not only been an underrepresented branch in Assyriology, but of socio-cultural scholarship in general. Insults and offensive language are traditionally considered taboos, and it has been theorised that the same stigmas that inhibit (historical) actors from speaking such utterances, have subsequently inhibited us from devoting it any meaningful academic attention.[10] Ancient historians have an additional obstacle to surpass. Considering that swearing in oral communication may have been frowned upon in the first place, using the same type of language in written sources, which might survive for posterity, would have been rare. This bias may be one of the reasons why the study of insults and offensive language has taken especially long to become "widely acknowledged as a legitimate and worthy target of scientific investigation."[11]

In so far as this target has been in sight of Assyriologists, the analysis of invective language has been part of textual commentaries to a considerable degree. Recently, Matuszak has noted the variety of insults in the disputation between two women (2WB).[12] Her focus was directed at the rhetoric functionality of the insults within the narrative of the text, analysing their efficacy with regard to the eventual winner of the debate with a small number of excursions into comparisons with related texts.[13] This is already a leap forward from the traditionally structural exegeses of disputation literature from the previous century of which Mittermayer's 2019 tome on this genre is also reminiscent.[14]

In their *The Class Reunion*,[15] an edition of a disputation between two scribes (D2S), Johnson and Geller dissect this prominent piece of Edubba literature and categorise the insults found therein. They were able to identify not only the significance of a large number of insults, but also proverbs that were either completely paraphrased or just referenced. Additionally, their work established the application of lexical lists in the disputation genre.[16]

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[10] Beers Fägersten, Stapleton, *Swearing Research*, 1.

[11] *Ibid*.

[12] J. Matuszak, "She was Dumbstruck and Took it to Heart: Form and Function of Insults in Sumerian Literary Disputations," in *Disputation Literature in the Near East and Beyond*, edited by E. Jiménez and C. Mittermayer, SANER 25 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 57–74; *ibid*., *"Und du, du bist eine Frau?!": Editio princeps und Analyse des sumerischen Streitgesprächs 'Zwei Frauen B',"* UAVA 16 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021).

[13] Matuszak, "Form and Function," 30–37.

[14] See for example B. Alster, H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "Lahar and Ashnan: Presentation and Analysis of a Sumerian Disputation," ASJ 9 (1987), 1–43; or Å. W. Sjöberg, ""He is a Good Seed of a Dog" and "Engardu, the Fool"," JCS 24, no. 4 (1972), 107–119; both now principal editions of disputations. C. Mittermayer, *Was Sprach der Eine zum Anderen?: Argumentationsformen in den sumerischen Rangstreitgesprächen* UAVA 15 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

[15] C. J. Johnson, M. J. Geller, *The Class Reunion: An Annotated Translation and Commentary on the Sumerian Dialogue Two Scribes*, CM 47. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015).

[16] Johnson, Geller, *Class Reunion*, 11–19.

This cursory overview of the most relevant modern literature on insults in Assyriological research shows that a single literary genre is overrepresented in this field. Even the entry on insults by Streck in the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (RlA) is unable to break outside of the Edubba bubble.[17] His short overview of illustrative insults is neatly sorted into a typology which, together with the intertextual approach towards D2S, serves as an inspiration for this thesis which broadens the traditional scope.

Since about a decade, the study of insults and offensive language has seen a steep increase. With the conception of a new collaborative research school at German universities in 2017 (SFB 1285), a stream of studies into invectivity has been coming out.[18] A special role is earmarked for historians, because the study of insults "offers an epistemic opportunity: it allows one to dig down to the foundations, so to speak, to uncover the historically varying causes and different manifestations of social orders."[19] The manifesto of this interdisciplinary project speaks of research into Greek and Roman expressions of invectives, here also known as *vituperatio*, but neither it, nor a recently published anthology of ancient *Niedertracht* mentions the wealth of offensive verbalisation from ancient Near Eastern textual traditions.[20] Here is an attempt at that.

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[17] M. P. Streck, "Schimpfwort (Insult)," *RlA* 12 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–2011), 189–191.

[18] Sonderforschungsbereich 1285, "Invektivität. Konstellationen und Dynamiken der Herabsetzung," Technische Universität Dresden, last modified Nov. 22, 2021, accessed Nov. 28, 2021, https://tu-dresden.de/gsw/sfb1285.

[19] Ellebrock et al., "Invektivität," 7.

[20] *Ibid*. D. Pausch, *Virtuose Niedertracht: Die Kunst der Beleidigung in der Antike* (München: Beck 2021).

2. Methodology

2.1. Selection of Texts

The typology of insults and offensive language has the form of a database in Microsoft Excel, for which 429 literary texts and 3597 non-literary texts were consulted. To limit the scope of this paper, the selection of texts is limited to the OB period. The 359 Sumerian literary texts mostly originate from the Edubba curricula, which are accessible through the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL).[21] Texts from this context that are not included the ETCSL are sourced from more recent publications.[22] The Sumerian literature is complemented by Akkadian literary texts which are known from OB manuscripts. Foster collected these 70 texts in his *Before the Muses* under the "Classical Period", but the insults and terms in their original language are sourced from the publications referenced in this anthology.[23] One literary genre which is not represented by these corpora is that of the lexical lists. These texts come with their own complications, but one such list (BT 9) is included in this typology.[24]

The non-literary texts included in this typology come from two series. *Altbabylonische Briefe* (14 volumes) gives a comprehensive and representative overview of the daily correspondence between private individuals as well as state officials in the OB period.[25] The royal letters from Mari stem from a different social context and were included with the aim of providing some variation in the results. These letters are published in the ARM series, but a representative English digest is found in Wolfgang Heimpel's *Letters to the Kings of Mari*, which includes ARM 26/1, 26/2, 27, and assorted letters.[26]

2.2. Approach and Identification Process

The translations formed the starting point of my research, and with every suspected insult I checked the text in its original language to corroborate the findings before including it in the database. This latter step proved especially important, since translations are inherently

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[21] J. A. Black et al., "The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature," Oxford University, last modified November 30, 2016, accessed October 21, 2021, https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/.

[22] Johnson, Geller, *Class Reunion*; Matuszak, *2WB*; A. Gadotti, A. Kleinerman, "The Rules of the School," *JAOS* 137, no. 1 (2017), 89–116.

[23] B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd edition (Bethesda, CDL Press, 2005).

[24] J. Klein, "An Old Babylonian Edition of an Early Dynasic Collection of Insults (BT 9)," in *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke*, edited by W. Sallaberger et al., Orientalia Biblica et Christiana, 14 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 135–149.

[25] Frankena, *AbB*.

[26] Heimpel, *Letters*.

influenced by modern interpretations and insults and terms were translated differently throughout the literature. The basic meanings are provided by the CAD and AHw dictionaries, as well as Attingers *Glossaire*.[27]

Verbal attacks proved to be relatively straightforward to identify. They stand out from their context because they express severe discomfort on behalf of the agent and they introduce tropes that are often uncalled for. The identification process is however subjective and many ambiguities still remain. Descriptions of human complexions or cultural expressions for example, could after all be just that.[28] For this paper, I only counted as insulting those descriptions that are a direct verbal attack, e.g. in a quotation, or that are demonstrably untrue based on their context. Terms such as 'hostile/angry words',[29] which are quite common in the letters, are not included, as there is no further indication that actual insults are meant. Expletives and profane exclamations are not included in this research.[30] The disputations contain not only invectives, but employ a wide variety of argumentative forms to establish the winner of the verbal contest.[31] These include forms of self-glorification that serve to denigrate the other, which are also not included to limit the scope of this study.

2.3. Documenting Results and Reaching Conclusions

The database forms the basis for the graphs and tables that feature throughout the results and discussion. In some cases, the disputation genre is left out to reduce the effects of its overrepresentation. Statistics are deduced from the different categories in the typology and are presented as absolute numbers and percentages. Some conclusions cannot be drawn from statistics, such as the relation between writer and addressee or stylistic features spanning a larger collective of insults. Therefore, the sources themselves always remain at the core of the argument.

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[27] P. Attinger, *Glossaire sumérien-français : principalement des textes littéraires paléobabyloniens* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021).

[28] Beers Fägersten, Stapleton, *Swearing Research*, 1–5.

[29] Cf. ARM 26/2 303, or even Gilgamesh and Huwawa A, 177 (ETCSL 1.8.1.5.).

[30] Such expressions are sporadic and rarely denigrating; see D. O. Edzard, "Exclamations," in *Sumerian Grammar* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 167–170.

[31] According to the classification presented by Mittermayer 2019, these are *Abwertung*, *Widerlegung*, *Überbietung*, *Vergleich*, *Relation zum Gegner*, *Vorausnahme*, *(Auf-)Forderung*, *Vorwurf*, and *Rhetorische Frage*. C. Mittermayer, *Was Sprach der Eine zum Anderen?: Argumentationsformen in den sumerischen Rangstreitgesprächen*, UAVA 15 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 139–154.

2.4. Database Structure

The database consists of three spreadsheets. The first two contain insults from literary texts and non-literary texts respectively. The first column ('ID') contains a code to identify the entry which is used for reference in this paper, as well as in the terms-spreadsheet (discussed below). The second column ('Entry') contains the insult in its original language, copied directly from its publication. Only the relevant phrases (e.g. both parts of a noun-verb idom) are selected. The third column ('Translation') contains the translation of the insult as in its publication. The fourth column ('Source') contains the source text in which the insult is found, featuring either its most common title or the reference number of the tablet. The fifth column ('Section/Line') contains the location of the insult in its source text. The sixth column ('Publication') contains the academic publication of the source text. The seventh column ('Genre') explains whether the source text is a correspondence (C), a dialogue (D), a hymn (H), a lexical text (L), a narrative (N), a proverb (P), or a text describing scribal life (S). The eighth column ('Language') exhibits the language of the insult, which can be Akkadian (A), Sumerian (S), a combination of Akkadian with a Sumerian logogram (S/A), or bilingual (B), or a combination of Sumerian and Akkadian (S/A). The ninth column ('Syntax') indicates whether the insult is a singular word (W),[32] a phrase (Ph) or a rhetorical question (Q). The tenth column ('Type') contains the type of insult that was used or the trait of the addressee that was insulted. This can be an animal metaphor (A), behavioural (B), a bodily defect (D), ethnic (E), or social status (S).[33] The eleventh column ('Cluster') indicates whether the insult occurs without any other insults in its immediate vicinity (0), occurs together with one other (1), or occurs in a cluster of multiple insults (2). The twelfth column ('Address') shows whether the person insulted is addressed indirectly or in the third person (I), or whether the insults are spoken directly (D), or whether there is no addressee (N, in the case of lexical lists). The thirteenth column ('Term ID') links the insults-spreadsheets to that of the insulting terms.

The third spreadsheet contains insulting terms. The first eight columns are identical to those of the insults. The ninth column ('Core term') shows the grammatical root of the entries, with which they can be found in the dictionary. The tenth column ('Insult ID') connects the term to the insults in the other spreadsheets. All three spreadsheets have a 'Comments' column with additional information about the entries.

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[32] Also referred to as 'swearword.'

[33] Streck, "Schimpfwort (Insult)," has tried to identify additional categories within this group, relating to sexuality, scatology, dirtiness and smelliness, and mental handicaps. I employed this umbrella term to avoid too much turbulence in the results.

2.5. Database Abbreviations

Below follows a list of abbreviations of the titles of the sources that are used in the database. They complement the standard list of Assyriological abbreviations.[34] References to modern publications, for example BT 9, ETCSL, AbB, and ARM, are found in the bibliography of this thesis.

ES	Enlil and Sud (ETCSL 1.2.2)
MM	The Marriage of Martu (ETCSL 1.7.1
GH-A	Gilgamesh and Huwawa A (ETCSL 1.8.1.5)
CA	The Curse of Agade (ETCSL 2.1.5)
LN	Lament for Nibru (ETCSL 2.2.4)
MG	A Man and his God (Lambert, 1987, 187–202)
AH	Atra-Hasis (Lambert, Millard, 1969)
UN-A	Ur-Namma A (ETCSL 2.4.1.1)
Š-B	Šulgi B (ETCSL 2.4.2.02)
Š-D	Šulgi D (ETCSL 2.4.2.04)
IE-IS	Letter from Išbi-Erra to Ibbi-Suen (ETCSL 3.1.17)
IS-PŠ	Letter from Ibbi-Suen to Puzur-Šulgi (ETCSL 3.1.20)
SI-U	Letter from Sin-Iddinam to Utu (ETCSL 3.2.05)
U-M	Letter from Ugubi to his mother (ETCSL 3.3.07)
EE	Enlil in the Ekur (ETCSL 4.05.1)
I-C	Inana C (ETCSL 4.07.3)
E-C	Edubba C (ETCSL 5.1.3)
DHP	The Debate between Hoe and Plough (ETCSL 5.3.1)
DGS	The Debate between Grain and Sheep (ETCSL 5.3.2)
DWS	The Debate between Winter and Summer (ETCSL 5.3.3)
DBF	The Debate between Bird and Fish (ETCSL 5.3.5)
DCS	The Debate between Copper and Silver (ETCSL 5.3.6)
DPT	The Debate between Date Palm and Tamarisk (ETCSL 5.3.7)
D-B	Diatribe B (ETCSL 5.4.11)

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[34] CDLI Wiki, "Abbreviations for Assyriology," The Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, last modified June 25, 2021, accessed October 21, 2021, https://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=abbreviations_for_assyriology.

D-C	Diatribe C (ETCSL 5.4.12)
IŠ	The Instructions of Šuruppag (ETCSL 5.6.1)
PCx	Proverb Collection[number] (ETCSL 6.1.xx)
PCU	Proverb Collection from Urim (ETCSL 6.2.3)
D2S	Dialogue between Two Scribes (Johnson, Geller, 2015)
E-R	Edubba R (Gadotti, Kleinerman, 2017)
2WB	Dialogue between Two Women B (Matuszak, 2021)

3. Results

The research yielded 840 insults in total. Of this number, 827 (98.5%) originates from literary texts and only 13 (1,5%) from non-literary texts. Additionally, a combined total of 102 insulting terms was found. Overall, the percentage of texts that include insults is very low: 16 out of 429 literary texts (3,7%) and only 13 out of 3597 non-literary texts (0,004%).

3.1. Literary Texts

The overrepresentation of the disputations (91,4%) in the corpus of literary texts becomes evident from the figure below (Fig. 1). For purposes of clarity, a separate graph indicates the distribution of insults in literary texts from different genres (Fig. 2).

Nearly all (94.4%) of the entries are in Sumerian, but 46 (5.6%) are bilingual. These bilingual entries originate from two texts. BT 9 is a bilingual lexical list of Sumerian insults and their Akkadian translations.[35] One fragmentary manuscript of 2WB is written in Akkadian, allowing it to be juxtaposed to the Sumerian versions. The results include 597 elaborate offensive phrases (72.2%), 53 insulting rhetoric questions (6.4%), and 177 swearwords (21.4%). It should be noted, that many phrases are compounds of a (swear)word qualified by a relative clause, e.g. "dog not producing sounds from the lyre but emitting a battle-cry" (*l_368*). The most common type of insult is directed at one's behaviour or personal characteristics, a
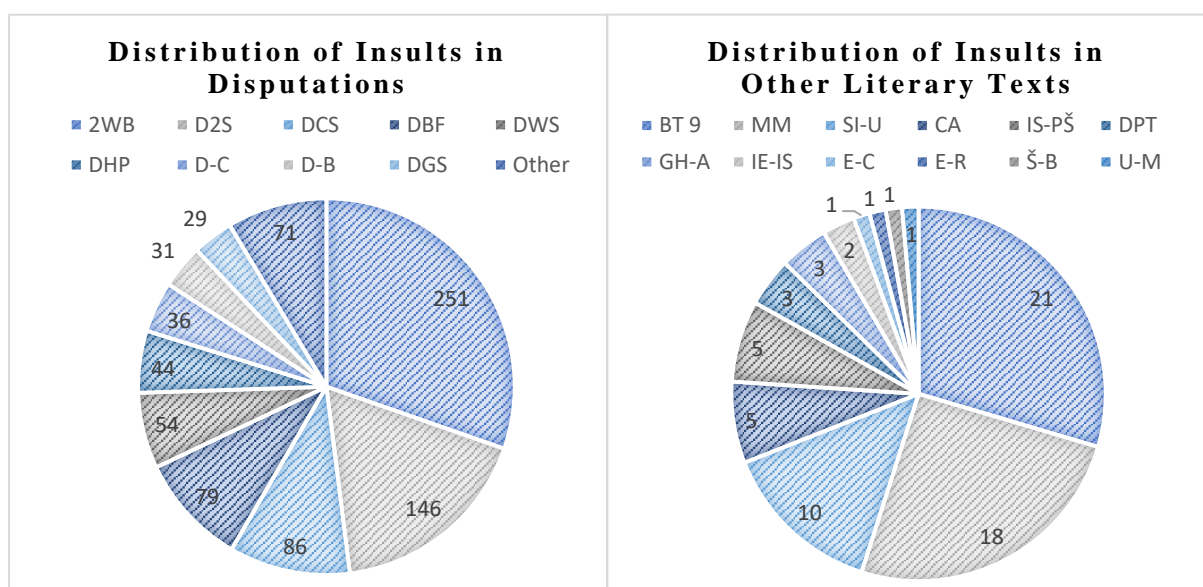

Figure 1: The distribution of insults in disputations, where 'other' referes to Fig. 2. N=827.

Figure 2: The distribution of insults in literary texts other than disputations, referred to as 'other' in Fig. 1. N=71.

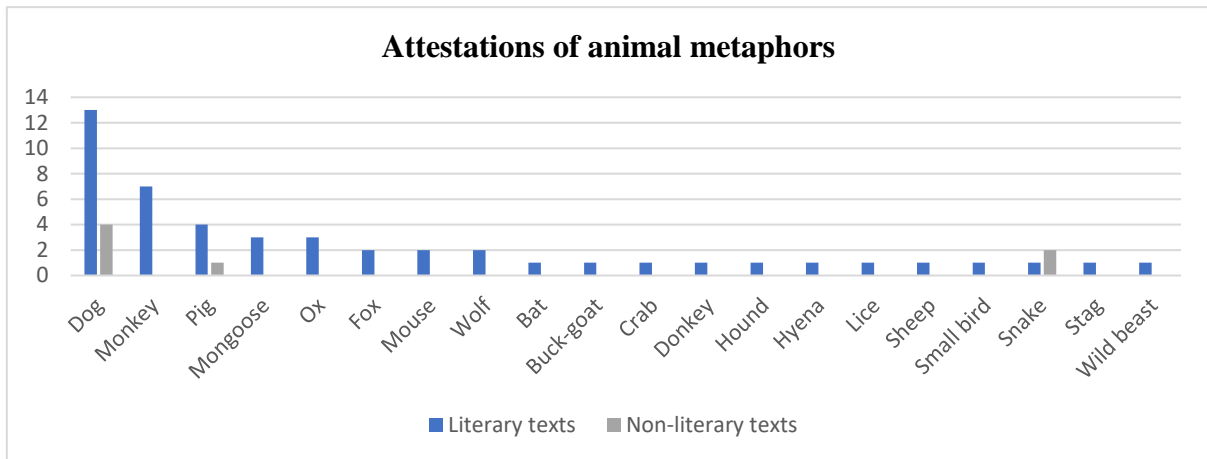[35] Two out of the 21 insults only have a Sumerian reading.

Figure 1: Attestations of animal metaphors in literary and non-literary texts. N=50.

category which is hard to define. 50 insults (6%) making use of animal metaphors were found (Fig. 3), 29 insults (3,5%) seem to have ethnic connotations, 66 insults (8%) refer to a bodily defect, and 214 insults (25,9%) are aimed at the addressee's social status. Notably, the majority of the entries fall in multiple categories at once. For example "he lives in a tent, exposed to wind and rain"[36] can be interpreted in both a behavioural, ethnical, or social way depending on the context.

Only a very small number of entries (8 attestations, or 1%) occur separately and is not clustered with other insults. One (*l_27*) comes from Šulgi B, one (*l_576*) from a piece of school literature, two (*l_45, l_46*) come from literary letters, and four of them come from the epilogue of 2WB where the final insult is repeated in a court of law. Only in one case are two entries found side-by-side with no further adjacent insults (*l_28, l_29*). The remaining 98,8% of entries occurs with two or more other insults, sometimes leading up to several dozen in the same paragraph.[37]

3.2. Non-literary Texts

The corpus included in this research only yielded few attestations of insults, which are presented in Table 1. The 13 insults from non-literary texts are all written in Akkadian, with *nl_13* corresponding to *nl_12* but using a logogram. The syntaxes are different from those in the literary texts: we only have one phrase (*nl_6*), three rhetoric questions, and nine separate words. The phrases and words all bear the same connotation. The types of insults are distributed

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[36] *l_10* ETCSL 1.7.1, 133.

[37] See for example *l_280-l_309* from the Debate between Copper and Silver (DCS), ETCSL 5.3.6.

ID	Entry	Translation	Source	Section/line	Publication	Genre	Language	Syntax	Type	Cluster	Addressee	Term	Comments
nl_1	awīlum mīnu	Was ist der Mann?	BM 15834	36	AbB I 46	C	A	Q	S	0	I		Followed by "(Etwas zu) übergeben steht nicht in seiner Macht"
nl_2	atta nakarāta	Bist du (denn) ein Fremder?	BM 80612	20	AbB II 20	C	A	Q	S	0	D		
nl_3	kalbi	hund	Ni. 910	6'	AbB V 160	C	A	W	A	0	I		"Als (wäre ich) ein ..."
nl_4	kalbam naḫdam	watchful dog	YBC 5591	13	AbB IX 39	C	A	W	A	0	I		"I will have (that) ... bring (it) to you"; quoting an earlier message of the addressee.
nl_5	kīam ipīš awīlim	is that the attitude of a gentleman?	BM 97215	17	AbB XII 52	C	A	Q	B, S	0	D		"(Even) if a gentleman does not know a gentleman, ..."
nl_6	lu2 awīlum atta	Be a gentleman!	BM 97531	23,24	AbB XII 55	C	A	Ph	B, S	0	D		
nl_7	kalbū zenû	angry dogs	BM 79823	3	AbB XIII 69	C	A	W	A	0	I		
nl_8	šinnim naditim	dropped out tooth	AO 3963	6	AbB XIV 43	C	A	W	D, S	0	D		"you have relinquished me to Šamaš like a ..."; CAD Š/III, 49
nl_9	šaḫim	pig	ARM 26/1 5	25	MC XII 26 5	C	A	W	A	0	I		"who is getting fat like a ..."
nl_10	kalbatum	bitch	ARM 26/1 6	16	MC XII 26 6	C	A	W	A	0	I	t_15	"A ... is scolding her children, saying: 'Do not lay your hands on anything!'"; paraphrasing a proverb?
nl_11	lu2 dumu.meš	little children	ARM 26/2 380	13'	MC XII 26 380	C	S	W	B, S	0	I	t_19	"Sir Ibal-Pi-El constantly scolds the division commander as follows: 'Why do you release reliable men and then replace (them) unnecessarily with ...?'"
nl_12	ṣērim ḫuppudim	blind snake	ARM 26/2 491	15	MC XII 26 491	C	A	W	A	0	I		"How is it that you took the lead of a ... of Ešnunakeans and then brought it up (here)?"
nl_13	muš ḫuppudim	blind snake	ARM 26/2 525	11	MC XII 26 525	C	S/A	W	A	0	I		Ibid. nl_12

Table 1: insults in non-literary texts.

relatively evenly with 7 animal metaphors (see Fig. 3) , 3 behavioural or personal insults, 6 aimed at one's social status, and one addressing a bodily defect. Here, too, some insults fall in both categories. None of the insults are clustered together with others; the letters seem to include very few strings of insults. Additionally, most of them (9 attestations or 69,2%) are not spoken directly at the addressee, but are either aimed at a third party or referring to insults spoken by someone else. The insult "blind snake"(*nl_12, nl_13*) is used twice to refer to a collective of people. This makes it the only attestation of an insult aimed to a group that does not scold their heritage or non-standard way of life.

3.3. Insulting Terms

From the 102 insulting terms found in the corpora, ranging from active verbs to participles to adjectives, 83 (81,4%) are from literary texts and 19 (18,6%) are from non-literary texts. In total there are 37 texts that include insulting terms, nine of which also have insults. These nine texts account for 25 cases where terms can be directly linked to insults. The database of terms is also the only place where Akkadian literary texts occur (*nl_23–nl_25*). The Sumerian literary

letters[38] do not contain insulting terms. The most common idiom in Sumerian is i n (d u b $_2$), attested 44 times (55%[39]), followed by e m e / i n i m s i g $_7$ (16,25%). In Akkadian, the term *karṣu* is the most common (5 attestations or 21,7%[40]), followed by forms derived from *ṭapālu* (4 attestations or 17,4%).

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[38] The 'royal correspondence' used in the scribal curricula.

[39] From 79 Sumerian and one bilingual entries.

[40] From 22 Akkadian and one bilingual entries.

4. Interpretation

Despite the number of entries and the results that this typology demonstrates, insults and other forms of offensive language are quite rare in the written sources as a whole. Only a small percentage of literary texts includes invectives, not to mention the tiny amount of personal letters that the typology includes. Nevertheless, the results exhibit some interesting patterns.

4.1. Literary Insults

The overwhelming majority of literary insults come from a small number of disputations and related dialogues. These have traditionally been studied according to their rhetoric merits. Within the complex web of aforementioned argumentative forms that these texts present, speeches can range from elaborate hypothetical situations demonstrating one's superiority to basic pejorative adjectives towards the other. From a rhetorical frame of reference, it was practice to read disputations back-to-front in order to assess the efficacy of each argument with respect to the eventual winner of the verbal contest.[41] The winner is usually the party that uses a wide variety of argumentative forms, who cleverly manipulates the other's arguments for their own benefit, and who is least reduced to uttering non-specific insults. Conversely, according to Mittermayer, "konzentriert sich der Verlierer zu stark auf die Abwertung des Gegners, was den Anschein einer übereilt oder hitzig gesprochenen Rede erweckt."[42] Insults are seen as a low-quality form of argumentation, and using too many insults without the more sophisticated arguments can lead a party to lose.[43] This rhetoric frame of reference, and its resulting devaluation of invective language, may explain some of its marginal academic attention.

Outside of the disputation genre, insults are much more scant (see Fig. 1). Even so, when they do occur, there seems to be no restriction to their severity or frequency. There is however a stylistic difference in that the elaborate argumentative forms are lacking and without the context of a debate, these basic forms feel more crude and offensive. The indirect nature of the insults, leaving the addressee is unable to respond, adds to this effect. In most cases, the addressee is a group of peoples such as the Martu, Guti, or Elamites. The derogatory epithets

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[41] "One should start from the result, and see whether the means used by the contestants are effective towards the goal desired (in the case of the winner) or not (in the case of the loser) and why this is so." B. Alster, H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "Lahar and Ashnan: Presentation and Analysis of a Sumerian Disputation," *ASJ* 9 (1987), 1–43.

[42] Mittermayer, *Argumentationsformen*, 158.

[43] The term 'quality' is often found in such discussions, which I find not always appropriate as the offensiveness of insults is always subjective.

are mostly applied to them in mythical narratives and literary letters and can range from extensive, as in The Marriage of Martu,[44] to fleeting, as in a letter from Išbi-Erra to Ibbi-Suen.[45] These expressly mentioned negative connotations, perhaps interpreted as 'ethnic slurs', only occur when the name of the group is written down. Not in every case is there a negative epithet. In the many cases where 'the enemy' is not identified, there are no such insults.[46]

Certain literary genres do not feature invectives at all. In royal praise poetry or in hymns to gods we never find an insult,[47] though insulting terms sometimes appear as part of long enumerations of different forms of speech. These contexts bring the difficulty of very closely related terms that may have ambiguous translations:

> To give cultic and cosmic rites, to deliver commands, to lie, deceive, slander, speak duplicitously, overstate, Inanna, are yours. Lies and honest answers, scoffing, violent speech, offering mockery, hostile speech, bearing teeth, shamed and deemed important, gloomy and taboo, happiness, hating, shining, darkening, fear, terror, panic, radiance, splendor…[48]

The only lexical list included in the database, BT 9, gives a number of insults without any context that might have been used in the disputation genre, especially in those dialogues that feature women.[49] The insults from this list do not seem to directly correspond to any of those in the dialogues but could well have been used as an inspirational model. BT 9 is an abstract from a larger Early Dynastic (ED) list, indicating that these tropes were also common in an earlier period. The lack of context that comes with lexical lists proves an obstacle in analysing and incorporating entries from the list OB lu2-azlag2 into this research. This list enumerates human qualities, activities, and conditions.[50] Some insults and descriptions of insulting characters, can be found among the entries. The lack of context and the obscure order of the entries however, give us no indication as to their exact connotations. We find for example:

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[44] See *l_1–l_18*.

[45] See *l_28–l_29*.

[46] The word 'enemy' (Sum. l u $_2$ k u r $_2$, Akk. *nakrum*) is generally used descriptively rather than an insult. In non-literary texts, groups like the Martu and Guti never receive epithets like in literature, see for example AbB XIII 91.

[47] With the exception of *l_27* from Šulgi B, which is hypothetical. ETCSL 2.4.2.02.

[48] This citation from Inanna C does not implicate that she is the goddess of swearing, but rather of performative or even transformative speech. Cf. *t_27*; C. Halton, S. Svärd, *Women's Writing of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Anthology of the Earliest Female Authors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 84.

[49] J. Klein, "BT 9," 136–137.

[50] M. Civil, R. D. Biggs, *The Series 'lú = ša' and Related Texts,* MSL 12 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1969), 151.

5.10	l u 2 s i k i l – d u 3 – a	*magrû*	insulting person
5.11	l u 2 i s – ḫ a b 2	*ašḫappum*	villain
5.12	l u 2 n a – ŋ a 2 – a ḫ	*nu'ûm*	stupid one
5.13	l u 2 m u 2 – d a	*šarbum*	person with rabies
5.14	l u 2 m u 2 – d a	*maḫûm*	ecstatic
5.15	l u 2 k a r 2 – g a	*ṭaplum*	person who has been slandered
5.16	l u 2 š u k a r 2 – g a	*muṭappilum*	slanderer[51]

Johnson and Geller have noted the borrowing of terms between disputations and lexical lists such as OB lu2-azlag2, which may have served as the "raw materials for its composition,"[52] as well as a source of inspiration for its users to model their insults after similar to BT 9. This latter aspect is arguably the most probably, as it should be noted that only a small number of the invectives is directly shared between these texts. The typology could aid in further defining the relationships between the miscellaneous terms in OB lu2=azlag2 and the narrative contexts in which they are employed.

The supposed purposes of disputations also present interesting scenarios. If they were a purely didactic part of the scribal curriculum, why would the scribe need to learn such a wide range of Sumerian invective vocabulary? Surely, their use would be diminished by the OB period after that language had died out.[53] One hypothesis might be that these texts function like photo-negatives of other genres and that only the structures of the insults might be copied while using laudatory words. Alternatively, the performativity of disputations has been stressed, and here insults would be of high comedic value.[54]

4.2. Insults in Personal and Official Correspondence

The letters from the AbB and ARM series show different patterns in their use of invective language. It occurs much more sporadically, despite the fact that people had plenty of reason to use insults. Many of the letters are quite angry in nature with many reasons to complain, be it about unprofessionalism, misconduct, or treachery. These situations are referenced relatively frequently compared to them actually playing out in the letters. This means that insults and

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[51] N. Veldhuis, "OB Lu₂-azlag₂ B-C," Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, last modified 2019, accessed Nov. 29, 2021, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus#Q000302.239.

[52] Johnson, Geller, *Class Reunion*, 18–19.

[53] Their rhetoric employment in actual debates in the Ur III period may be eluded to in Šulgi B ll. 230, 235; see Mittermayer, *Argumentationsformen*, 31.

[54] E. g. Matuszak, "Form and Function," 59. We may remember the Akkadian manuscript of 2WB.

insulting terms are often used indirectly, i.e. "A constantly scolds B as follows: […]"[55] as opposed to direct tirades of the literary kind. Moreover, it can be difficult to differentiate between people being offended by actions of others rather than verbal abuse, since this is reflected identically in Akkadian as well as in our modern translations.[56] Even when the author of a letter directly opposes the addressee in a letter, the hurling of insults is rare. The famous letter from Nanni to Ea-Nāṣir, for example,[57] has a very angry tone, but contains no ad-hominem arguments and – while not neutral – remains generally descriptive of Ea-Nāṣir's misconduct.

Disrespectful or insulting utterances in these letters are thus, according to Walther Sallaberger, negligible to the point of not even occurring.[58] Letters are generally polite because they deal with business or administrative matters, something which does not generally demand such language; this may in fact be detrimental to one's professional relationship. The current research indeed corroborates this thesis, but it does not mean that people were therefore quite polite. Instead, expressions of '*negative Höflichkeit*' take the form of threats, frequent use of imperatives or vetitives, or simply the excluding of polite phrases.[59] To this, we can add the scoffing remarks *nl_2, nl_5, nl_6* "are you a stranger/man" and "is that the attitude of a man?", coming closest to actual slurring in these letters. Nevertheless, the indirect references to the use of insulting language demonstrate that true swearwords were in fact used in communication.[60] Whenever someone mentions they are offended, or whenever two people discuss a third person they both do not like, they do not hesitate to use insults or especially insulting terms. There seems to be little restraint. The reason why there are so few attestations, then, is because the situation had to allow for this, and this is usually not the case in a letter with another specific purpose. In the Mari letters, unfavourable actions or hostilities are discussed that are much more severe than a simple scolding. The authors may thus allot it less attention.

There is a difference to be discerned in the non-literary corpora between *alltagsbriefe* and royal correspondence.[61] The 2762 letters in the AbB series yielded eight insults (or one

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[55] *nl_11, t_19.*

[56] Cf. *ṭapālu* CAD Ṭ, 47ff. The term has not so much to do with the action, as with the reaction it invokes.

[57] Not included in the typology but representative. A. L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967), 82–83.

[58] W. Sallaberger, *"Wenn Du mein Bruder bist, …": Interaktion und Textgestaltung in altbabylonischen Alltagsbriefen*, CM 16 (Groningen: STYX, 1999), 70.

[59] Sallaberger, 1999, 175–180.

[60] The extent of this goes even further than is shown by the database, as it does not include terms like 'hostile words.' These occur a lot more frequently and imply angry arguments.

[61] Daily correspondence is represented well by the AbB series, though it also includes some official/royal correspondence. The letters in the ARM series are strictly from official/royal contexts.

letter in 345 letters included an insult), whereas the 835 royal letters from only two volumes of the ARM series yielded five (one in 167), thus containing about twice as much invective language. The use of insulting terms in the latter corpus is also more creative, as we for example find the phrase "(it) is an insult to the one who hears it!" twice.[62] While this requires further research into the Mari letters and royal correspondence in general, this seems to indicate that within this social network, the use of insults was more liberal. Within the official hierarchies, superiors would feel more able to use strong language against their inferiors, who in turn would address their superiors with indignities done by other people, hoping for justice. More research can done in the connection between the social or professional relationship between individuals and the language they employ in their communication.

As the above sections note, insults are often surrounded by semi-related vocabulary and tropes that make it its offensive nature hard to define. How do we discern an insult or derogatory remark from a description that is more or less neutral? Is stating "who is not of Sumerian origin"[63] insulting, or simply a fact? Is to call someone a liar offensive, if that person was not speaking the truth? The answer lies in context. Anything can be offensive when said or written in a certain way. The biggest downside of this typology, similar to that of the lexical lists, is the lack of context which gives insults most of their meaning. However, the different characteristics of the entries and their comparative qualities make for a branch of research that has wide implications and potential, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

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[62] *t_20, t_21.*
[63] *l_33.*

5. Applications in Assyriology

The interpretation of the results has shown some aspects of the viability of swearing research. While perhaps not explicit through the forms of the insults themselves, this broader frame of reference allows for a future revaluation of several traditional paradigms and social or linguistic networks.

5.1. Morality and How to Avert it

Lambert's benchmark essay on morals in ancient Mesopotamia[64] omits offensive language all together, and Van der Toorn's *Sin and Sanction*[65] discusses it only peripherally in juridical contexts, despite the fact that, as we have now seen, there are opportunities for its study. The Sumerian proverbs contain some references to invectives.[66] Adjectives such as "wicked" (*t_57*) or "violent" (*t_84*) indicate that negative connotations did exist in this respect. However, the general attitude remains neutral and the main principle seems to be that of the quote in the introduction of this paper: initiating a verbal assault leads to a downward spiral of swearing.[67] Reflections on its morality are not explicitly stated. For this, in fact, we have to rely on circumferential evidence, for example whenever an insulting term occurs in an enumeration of actions or speeches disapproved by a deity.[68] As we have already seen, the featuring of terms relating to offensive language or behaviour in lexical lists remains ambiguous. Improper conduct is more clearly defined in later times and is referenced abundantly, for example, as collected by Lambert in his *Babylonian Wisdom literature*[69] or, more clearly, in the first millennium *šurpu*-series where it occupies the second tablet along with "sins of the tongue"[70]; false accusations, curses, and other taboos.[71]

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[64] W. G. Lambert, "Morals in Ancient Mesopotamia," In *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology: Selected Essays by W. G. Lambert*, edited by A. R. George and T. M. Oshima, 11–27, Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 15 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

[65] K. Van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study*, Studia Semitica Neerlandia 21 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985).

[66] *t_54–t_84, esp. t_57.*

[67] *t_62, 63, 67, 68, 70, 71, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 84.*

[68] See fn. 49, which notes that instance's neutrality. For negative connotations see EE ll. 18–25 (*t_27*).

[69] E.g. "A Bilingual Hymn to Ninurta," W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 118–120.

[70] Van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 20.

[71] E. Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations*, AfO Beih. 11 (Graz: Im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1958).

Personal documents such as letters are rare to mention such existential topics as morality or ethical behaviour. However, by taking insults to be one of the most basic and universal aspects of human communication, this study has indicated opportunities to approximate such topics in otherwise oblique texts or genres. Even though letters may not include elaborate tirades, they do expose social boundaries, and even better when they are crossed. There are numerous occasions where people write about them being offended, expressing discomfort. These situations are usually accompanied by a call for action to the addressee of the letter:

> Now, herewith Ulluri is carrying slander and ungood things against me to my lord. Take a stand and answer on my behalf![72]

In some cases this means directly confronting the slanderer with their own statements. The letter ARM 26/1 6 includes the following situation:

> "You scold me as follows: "Do not go by the opinion of a denunciator! And do not listen to denunciations [*karṣi,* M.E.]!" A bitch is scolding her children, (saying), "Do not lay your hands on anything!" And she got there first, raised the skin of the flews and proceeded to eat. Now you keep acting just like it. […]" This my lord painfully wrote me. Now, why did my lord write me [all these things]?[73]

Interestingly, it looks like the 'lord' quoted a proverb to advance his argument (the 'bitch' is here literally a female dog (*kalbatum*)). This is the only occasion when an insult – beyond individual swearwords like "dog" etcetera – seems to have been directly paraphrased in a letter from a work of literature, though further research is needed to retrieve the original.

The efficacy of offensive language is expressed in various ways. Notably, attestations of this sentiment in this database are never passive or from a first person point of view, e.g. "I feel insulted." Such phrases sporadically occur in literary texts,[74] but in letters these phrases are inverted without exception. We find their authors accusing the other person of actively offending them; "they/you insulted me." Consequently, verbal adjectives of insulting terms are rarely found, despite the fact that these forms are attested, for example, in the aforementioned lexical list OB lu2=azlag2. This purported avoidance of sentimental expressions of

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[72] *t_16*, ARM 26/2, l. 344, Heimpel, *Letters*, 310.
[73] *t_15*, Heimpel, *Letters*, 178–179 with fn.
[74] *t_29.*

'offendedness' and focus on insolent behaviour of others that we see in letters, deserves a separate study.[75]

Very rarely in letters, and more commonly in literary texts, idioms are used which elaborate upon the sentimental value and efficacy of invectives more suggestively. "To take to heart" an insult is to pay heed to, or to be offended.[76] The letter ARM 26/2 329 notes for example: "If my lord continues writing him hurtful words, he will not place them in his heart."[77] The database contains the occurrences of this idiom with insults as its object, most often stated simply as "the insult" without further detail. However, especially the situations where these terms are stated in conjunction with the insults that were uttered, allow for lucrative opportunities to assess the insulting 'value' of these insults.

An example is the Debate between Bird and Fish (DBF), where entire insulting speeches are summarised as "thus, Fish insulted Bird on that day."[78] This implies that the entire aforementioned citation is meant to be offensive. But this does not mean that Bird felt offended, on the contrary, he "did not take to heart the insults Fish had cast at it."[79] When is something offensive, and when not? The disputation 2WB proves to be a useful case study in this respect. Matuszak has argued, based on a theoretical framework designed by Labov,[80] that a differentiation can be made between 'personal' insults – those that invoke a response – and ritual insults – those that are not commented upon and aim at some other rhetoric or didactic goal.[81] It is the insults themselves that form the most important bases for such an assessment. However, 2WB has the speeches between the contestants follow up on each other immediately. In the other debates where we find intermissions like those in DBF, these would be even more suitable to determine the efficacy of the insults as it requires less interpretive reading.

Letters offer us a less thorough understanding of the participants and context of the insulting remarks. The entire timespan and all of the conditions are generally not known. Therefore, it would be a challenge to analyse which insults were responded to and which were

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[75] Jaques discusses various expressions of sentiment in Sumerian, but sees insults as a cause for feelings of contempt. M. Jaques, *Le vocabulaire des sentiments dans les textes sumériens: Recherche sur le lexique sumérien et akkadien*, AOAT 332 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2006), 71 fn. 154, 285 fn. 591.

[76] In Sumerian: š a 3 = š e g i d 2; Attinger, *Glossaire* 411. In Akkadian: *ina libbi(šu) šakānu*; CAD Š/I, 138; AHw III, 550 C1.

[77] Heimpel, *Letters*, 305–306, ll. 26.

[78] *t_41*; ETCSL 5.3.5 ll. 51.

[79] *t_42*; ETCSL 5.3.5 ll. 53.

[80] W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972).

[81] J. Matuszak, "Form and Function," 60–61, 70–73.

not. Authors of letters discussed situations which left them offended as mentioned above, but insults which did not stick are naturally not represented in the sources.

5.2. Contextualisation and Significance

Cases such as in DBF, or whenever the relationship between insults and the accompanying terms that explain their nature is made explicit, are not only conducive for the interpretation of the insults, but also for the evaluation of the terms themselves. There is a wide variety of terms to describe the act of insulting or 'insult' in general, which occur in different contexts. The Akkadian *karṣu akālu* for example has been translated "to accuse," "to denounce," or "to slander."[82] *Ṭapālu* is "to scorn," "to treat with disrespect," "to slander," "to insult."[83] Every one of these translations makes sense in its respective context. However, we would benefit from further defining the multitude of ambiguous terms, such as the Akkadian *arāru, errēru, karṣu, lemēnu, lezēnu, magrītu, muqallilu, nazāru, pištu, sanāqu, ṣelû, šaḫšaḫḫu, šarrabu, šillatu, tuššu, ṭapālu,* and *zērāti,* or the Sumerian a š 2, e m e s i g 7 (g u 7), i n (d u b 2), (š u) k a r 2, or s u l u m – m a r, and the verbs or objects that can accompany them.

The term *karṣu* for example is predominantly found in legal contexts, where it signifies a false or unfounded accusation. Doing so is often described with the idiom "pointing the finger," (*ubāna tarāṣu*[84]) which may lead to a trial.[85] In 2WB we find an example of such a court case.[86] The fact that *karṣu* is sometimes equated with e m e s i g 7,[87] may also be significant. If we can connect the insults with the terms that they are most commonly associated with, as well as further contextualise the legal contexts of the terms, we may be able to qualify the severity of different orders of verbal abuse more clearly. Additionally, such research would be beneficial to our understanding of the juridical terms themselves.

Another form of speech that can be derogatory to the addressee is the curse. While not part of this study per se, it may be closer related to swearing than previously anticipated. This

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[82] CAD K, 222–223; AHW I, 450.

[83] CAD Ṭ, 47–48; M. P. Streck, *Supplement to the Akkadian Dictionaries: Vol. 2: D, T, Ṭ,* LAOS 7,2 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019), 112–113.; AHW III, 1379.

[84] CAD U/W, 6; AHW III, 1326 1d.

[85] See Codex Hammurapi § 127 or 132. M. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, WAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 105–106.

[86] Matuszak, 2WB, ll. 172–230. Here, the two contestants have to justify their verbal aggression, resulting in one of the women having to pay a fine of 1/3 mina silver, as well as to swear an oath to not swear in this way again.

[87] CAD K, 222.

is already indicated by the fact that some terms can be used interchangeably to designate both to swear and to curse.[88] Additionally, they are sometimes juxtaposed like in this proverb:

> It is an insult resulting from an insult. It is a curse resulting from a curse. It is the constant renewal of destiny.[89]

While the argument that curses are much more severe or even religious affairs because of their real-world impact still holds,[90] there are indications that they follow the same principles and mechanisms as insults. Both are aimed at an opponent, use the same terminology, can take the same rhetoric position in an argument, and invite further verbal abuse. A systematic comparison between the reactions to being cursed or being insulted would illuminate the social contexts of invectives as well as curses and, as a result, the latter's religious parameters too.

Finally, the research potential contents of the insults themselves have generally been either overlooked, or taken too seriously. The scrutiny devoted to rhetoric has shifted the attention away from the details and metaphors used in insults. However, the values and precepts of these symbols may be best studied at the intersection of positive and negative contexts to grasp their full significance. For example, an elaborate insult from the debate between Grain and Sheep states:

> Like fire beaten down (?) in houses and in fields, like small flying birds chased from the door of a house, you are turned into the lame and the weak of the Land.[91]

Again, reciprocating between similar phrases in different contexts may, for one, exhibit what makes this particular statement offensive, and also give new connotations to otherwise achromatic descriptions. Conversely, increased contextualisation may reduce some insults in their offensive power. For example, the fact that foreigners never receive derogatory epithets outside of literary contexts, and the fact that these insults can be demonstrably anachronistic or false in most cases, may tell something about the social setting of literature.

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[88] 'a š 2' is usually translated as 'curse,' but is more likely an 'insult' in contexts such as proverbs; e.g. t_57–t_59.

[89] *t_62–t_63*; ETCSL 6.1.01 B ll. 34–35.

[90] A. M. Kitz, *Cursed Are You!: The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 3–5.

[91] *l_114*; ETCSL 5.3.2 ll. 172–174.

6. Conclusion

The repulsiveness and taboo nature of insults might be what gives them an intriguing attraction. They have the unique capability of illuminating aspects of emotion and morality in otherwise texts that can be eccentric beyond interpretation or be confined to dry professional communication. While not for a lack of source material, invective language has long been peripheral to research into 'serious,' established topics such as rhetoric, and only recently have started to see academic attention. These studies focus on the marginally sized literary genre of disputations because of its wealth of data, despite the ubiquity of swearing in all types of human communication.

This thesis has made an attempt to assess the feasibility of further research into the field of invectivity. The first step herein is the typology of insults from not only Sumerian and Akkadian literary works from the OB period, but also from texts used in personal communication or royal correspondence. To bridge the gap between these two categories of texts was a primary goal of this study. While its limited scope allowed for little exploration of comparative and illustrative case studies, some tentative patterns can already be discerned.

Insults could range from crude swearwords to offensive statements with elaborate stylistic features. There is no exact definition of what gives them their insulting power, because this depends on context. When insults contain (alleged) personal information about the addressee, they mostly stress aspects of abnormality as opposed to the 'standard' social behaviour or heritage. There is a high degree of borrowing insults and offensive motifs between literary texts. When it comes to rhetoric, it is surprising how little remains of the elaborate discourses in letters, which by themselves show significant patters in attestations and distributions. The multitude of terms that denote expressions of invectivity can demonstrate the sentimental values associated with them by the authors themselves. This allows for more fundamental studies into morality, social structures, closely related forms of adverse speech, and probably more aspects of Mesopotamian history and society that have yet to be identified.

In accordance with the outlines proposed in the manifesto of the Collaborative Research Group on invectivity,[92] a more expanded scope would be of great benefit. The results from letters may have been minimal, but many corpora remain to be explored. The remaining thirty volumes of Mari letters are a prime candidate with indications of a relatively high number of insults. The Old Assyrian correspondences are promising as well, because they exhibit a more

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[92] Ellebrock et al., "Invektivität," 21.

direct and personal communication between individuals.[93] Additionally, the lemmas of the insulting terms provide ample opportunity to study their attestations in a wider variety of contexts, spanning into the first millennium BCE. As a result, what has been stigmatised can become pardoned.

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[93] M. T. Larsen, "Affect and Emotion." In *Veenhof Anniversary Volume, Studies Presented to Klaas R. Veenhof on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, edited by W. H. Van Soldt et al., Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 89. Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2001), 275–286 (esp. 280–281).

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7.3. Abbreviations

AHw	*Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959–1981).
AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung (1933ff.).
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968ff.).
AOS	American Oriental Series (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1925ff.).
ArchAn	*Archivum Anatolicum/Anadolu* Arşivleri (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi, Eskiçağ Dilleri ve Kültürleri, 1995ff.).
ASJ	Acta Sumerologica (Hiroshima, Dept. of Linguistics, University of Hiroshima, 1979ff.).
BT	*The Brockmon Tablets at the University of Haifa: Royal Inscriptions* (Haifa: Haifa University Press; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989).
BWL	*Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010).
CDLI	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, https://cdli.ucla.edu/ (Los Angeles/Berlin).
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1982ff.).
CM	Cuneiform Monographs (Groningen: STYX; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1992ff.).
DCCLT	Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts.
ePSD	Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary Project.
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society.
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1947ff.).
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989ff.).
MSL	Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1937ff.).

OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Freiburg, Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973ff.).
OHCC	*Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta (Leuven: Peeters).
ORACC	Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus.
RA	Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie orientale (Presses Universitaires de France).
RlA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie,* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1932–2018).
SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012ff.).
UAVA	Untersuchtungen zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1960ff.).
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1990ff.).