

# A preliminary sketch of Gutian grammar.

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In April of 2020, a series of cuneiform tablets at the Miskatonic University Library, of unknown provenance but dated to the 22<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, were determined to belong to a previously unknown language of early cuneiform culture. Due to its similarity in phonology to Gutian personal names, as well as the presence of common vocabulary with Elamite, the language has been termed “Gutian,” though the connection with the Gutian people, who migrated from the Zagros foothills to southern Mesopotamia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, is not completely certain.

This article presents as much as can be said about the phonology and grammar of the language based on the few extant tablets at the Miskatonic University Library, including a bilingual foundation tablet in Gutian and Sumerian, a hymn to a river-god, and several personal letters.

## Phonology

Based on the cuneiform texts, the following phonemes can be reconstructed for Gutian. Their exact pronunciations cannot be determined for certain.

Consonants		Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal		m	n			
Stop	Fortis*	p	t		k	? <'>
	Lenis*	b	d		g	
Fricative			s	ʃ <š>		
Affricate			ts <z>			
Rhotic			r			
Approximant			l	j <y>		

\*The terms fortis and lenis are used as it has not been determined how the stops were distinguished, whether by voicing or aspiration.

Vowels	Front	Mid	Back
Close	i	(i)*	u
Mid	e		
Open		a	

\*/u/ and /i/ are written variously as u, i, or ui in unstressed syllables. Thus it can be said that /u/ and /i/ are neutralized, not being distinctive phonemes in this environment. This reduced vowel was probably pronounced something like [ɨ].

The sequences <ae> and <au> are considered diphthongs.

## Stress and Morphophonology

Gutian exhibits a fixed-stress system, with primary stress falling on the first or second syllable. This can be seen in the systematic use of different signs thought to have the same pronunciation in different verbal forms (see Verbal Morphology), along with the aforementioned centralization of /u/ and /i/. This lends credence to the theory that these different signs indicated tonal differences in Sumerian that were not retained in Akkadian.

𒄠𒄣𒄠𒄣𒄠𒄣𒄠𒄣

*gu-ti-u-meš*

*Gutumeš*

[ˈgutimeʃ]

Gutium-GEN

Of Gutium

## Morphology

### Nominal Morphology

Gutian nominals are inflected for case but not number. The absolutive, genitive, ergative, and dative cases determine a noun's role in the sentence; the locative and comitative cases have different forms and also behave like cases, but other noun endings are considered postpositions. Case suffixes and postpositions are the same for pronouns and common nouns.

Case	Abbreviation	Forms
Absolutive	ABS	-∅
Ergative	ERG	-(u)z
Genitive	GEN	-(m)eš
Dative	DAT	-(a)ya
Locative	LOC	-(i)k
Comitative	COM	-(r)em

The vowel in the ergative suffix forms a diphthong au with a previous /a/, meaning it must be /u/, while the vowel in the locative is elided after /a/, meaning it must be /i/.







𒄠𒄡𒄢𒄣𒄤

iš-ga zu-meš

ušga zumeš

[iʃˈga ˈtʃumeʃ]

servant.boy 2-GEN

Your servant... (*Letters*, 184)

The sequences šu and uš are often found in words related to water and are perhaps imitative in origin.

𒄠𒄡𒄢𒄣𒄤𒄥𒄦𒄧𒄨𒄩𒄪𒄫𒄬𒄭𒄮𒄯𒄰𒄱𒄲

šu a-u-šeš ri-in-tu-uz<sub>2</sub> ka<sub>2</sub>-ar-ka-ra-ta

šu aušeš rintuz karkárata

[ʃu ˈauʃeʃ ˈrintitʃ karˈkarata]

water river-GEN sun-ERG shine\INDIC-ITER

The sun makes the river's water glisten. (*River Hymn*, 121)

## Kinship Terminology

Gutian kinship terminology is difficult to reconstruct. There seem to be multiple words for brother, one used more broadly, perhaps particularly denoting an older brother (*téma*), and another denoting a younger brother or assistant (*iru*). The latter usage is probably a calque of the Sumerian term *šeš* (𒄠𒄡).