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Review report on the Phd dissertation of Sara Manasterska, titled "Speech Acts in Akkadian in the 1st millennium BCE"

The author is to be congratulated for tackling a very large and significant corpus of texts, and working her way through them with a clear, novel and rigorous methodology. The writing style is excellent, clear and concise and the work over all is insightful and important for the field. Nonetheless, the dissertation is in need of some revision, as some things are left underdeveloped. The dissertation is a solid piece of work that clearly passes as a PhD dissertation. With fairly small revising I can recommend the rating "good" but even in its current form, it is certainly "sufficient for the doctoral degree."

Overall, what made this dissertation difficult to evaluate is that the quality of discussion is excellent, the argumentation is solid and innovative on many occasions and the conclusions and remarks make a genuine contribution in our field. At the same time, the lack of sufficient "unpacking", and explanations as well as only half-developed conclusions and summaries force the reader to hunt these small treasures through the book, instead of the author herself summing up her main findings in each chapter and in the conclusion of the work.

In this review, I will focus on evaluating the following criteria: 1) Choice of topic, research problem, refining of research task and research questions 2) Conceptual clarity, definitions and theoretical knowledge as well as methods 3) Material 4) Acknowledgement of previous research 5) Results and conclusions 6) Format and structure and 7)Critical attitude.

1) Choice of topic, research problem, refining of research task and research questions

The aim of the thesis is most clearly stated on page 2: "The aim of this work is to contribute to the understanding of communicative processes in Akkadian and the implicit rules that governed them, including a glimpse into the shared assumptions, presumptions and social norms that guided them. The broad selection of textual genres will illustrate a variety of phenomena exhibited in different contexts and influenced by a variety of factors." The work reaches this aim. The topic has significant value for the field and the research task is appropriately refined. The scope of the work is
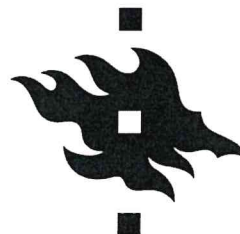
commendable – I find it very important that both Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian material is used and it certainly increases the significance of the work for the field.

2) Conceptual clarity, definitions and theoretical knowledge; Methodology

The introduction presents some very interesting departure points regarding speech acts. However, since most of the dissertation text consist of translations of Akkadian texts and analysing the "moves" in them, the Introduction should be clarified. As it is, **it does sufficiently explain the choices made in the chapters where the actual moves are identified.** This is a larger issue than just issue in the introduction. It is not entirely clear what is the relationship of the "moves" (used as analytical tools in the main body of the work) to sociolinguistic theory and the theory of speech acts in each of the actual chapters (2.1; 2.2; 3.1; 4.1; 4.2). It would make sense either to clarify this in the introduction or (even better) make that connection in every chapter (2.1; 2.2; 3.1; 4.1; 4.2) explicitly. For example, on the pp 41-43 or 134-135 there is good and well-argued discussion on how the author defines threats, promises, warnings etc, but the relationship of these terms to speech act theory is thin and there are few references to theoretical literature. The reader is left with the impression that these are based on author's own ideas. Nothing wrong with that, but it clashes with Inroduction where the author explicitly states that the work is grounded in theoretical understandings from speech act theories. An exception to this is the introduction of 4.1 Apologies and Excuses (pp. 291-293) which is well argued on the basis of theoretical and Assyriological literature, with a novel ideas of the author herself. The conclusions of 4.1 seem more thoroughly developed as well compared with other chapters (pp. 330-332).

On page 5, after having introduced speech acts on the general level, the author points out two major issues. First, "While a certain amount of theory is necessary to see the patterns in the data and to bring them in order, an Austinian-Searlean typology is excessively restrictive in an investigation of the type that is proposed here." and immediately following "This entire typology is a product of modern scholarship and has little to do with what the ancient thought of their use of language themselves" On page 6 the very good solution is introduced that one can define these ancient typologies by analysing the ancient texts themselves. The four basic ways of Levinson are presented as the method (pp. 6-7). However, there is little explanation why Levinson 2017 was chosen and later on in the work where the actual texts are discussed the author does not return sufficiently to this cornerstone of her methodology. I realize that this theme is developed further in "1.4 the procedure chosen for this study" which highlights some of the departure points for the classification system used in this particular study, **but this important chapter (1.4) remains somewhat unconnected with the actual analytical chapters** (2.1; 2.2; 3.1; 4.1; 4.2). I would encourage the author to expand this chapter by explicitly naming all the speech act categories that she has developed and is using in her work and giving a short description of each, preferably with cross-references to relevant analytical chapters. As it now stands, the different speech-act names "supplication," "explanation," "blessing" etc are not fully explained analytical categories. Instead they seem sometimes ad hoc, although careful reading will reveal that author has given a lot of though to them. These thoughts should be made more explicit. That way the work will be even more useful for researchers who might wish to emulate her methodology.
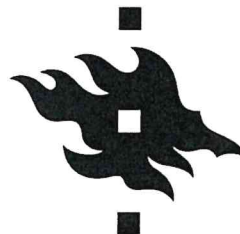
A methodological issue that is present throughout the work is apparent already in Introduction (p. 11), when the author argues that frequently occurring patterns indicate norms and tendencies. I absolutely agree, but **throughout the work the author limits herself to vague vocabulary like "often, "regularly" "rarely" "a fair number"** etc. It seems clear that the author has done the necessary work of organizing her material carefully and meticulously -- why not give weight to her arguments by providing more numerical information throughout the work, for example in tables? To give just one example, on page 280, the author writes "As rather common, the term of address also switches from 'father' in the greeting to 'lord' in the body of the letter." I'm sure the author has the data – why not explain how common this is, exactly? The footnotes where texts are listed (eg fn 256) in chapter 4.1 is a step in right direction, but this kind of summarized information is much needed in other chapters as well and could be presented in tables of appendices if needed. Another good idea are the summarized categories presented on page 341. As a side-note, observing patterns in a large text corpus like this is made much easier by use of modern annotation and analysis tools, such as Atlas.TI or database programs.

Regarding translations, I would advise using translation "slave" only when it is clear that the person is actually considered property. Translation "slave girl" should be avoided even then, as that carries connotation of youth that amtu does not. Other problematic translation choices which are used systematically in the work are "sheikh" and "tribe" which are rather ethnocentric (see eg Bennett 2021 The "Queens of the Arabs" During the Neo-Assyrian Period').

Overall, however, the reader can easily fathom what the research is about. Concepts are overall well explained and the methods used are well presented and justified. **The remaining challenges mostly lie in connecting theory, method and material even better.**

3) Material

In "1.5 Sources" the reason for choosing correspondence as source material is well argued for, the reason for using conversation in narrative works less so (yet sufficiently). However, this chapter should be clarified and expanded. **As it now stands, the reader is just presented with a fait accompli -- there is no discussion on the political history of the region (even 2-3 pages would give some depth to the text) and virtually no discussion on why these particular publications were selected for analysis.** They definitely include the majority of the published letters from the first millennium, but a short discussion on the letter and narrative material that is left outside these publications should be added. The discussion on why these particular literary works were included (listed on p 35) is particularly sorely missed. Analysing literary texts is a whole sub-field of study in itself and without the proper background, the author's conclusions remain superficial. As an example, I mention discussion where the actions of Ishtar and Ereshkigal are seen from gender persepctive (pp 87-88). This is a good idea, but Ishtar and Ereshkigal in these narrative contexts are extremely special cases and should not be seen as examples of goddesses in general. Another question is, whether it really makes sense for the author to offer her own translations on literary works that have been intensively studied and translated for decades. It would be more prudent to use the standard edition translations. If there is a specific reason why a certain deviation from the standard translation is necessay, the author could indicate that in a footnote.

In general, the approach of the author to sources is laudable. The material for the dissertation is qualitatively relevant and quantitatively sufficient.

4) Acknowledgement of previous research

The use of primary sources is exemplary, but I wonder why the author is not using the **ORACC editions of SAA texts**? They include quite a few corrections to transliterations and translations as well. At least this should be addressed in the Introduction.

The question of how to use **secondary literature** is not easy to solve in the work of this kind. Of course many of the texts have been discussed in previous research. In a PhD with the specific aim of examining "moves" in the texts, it does not make sense to cite every scholar who has for example discussed the "do not fear!" expression (eg Martti Nissinen) that is mentioned on p. 59. At the same time, I would have liked to see more references to previous discussions – this is not absolutely necessary but would bring more depth to the discussion. Particularly the extensive amount of research that has been done on literary works would have deserved more attention.

Overall, however, the work serves as an appropriate continuation of previous debates and definitely introduced a new initiative. Previous research is thus acknowledged, but not repeated as such.

5) Results and conclusions

Unfortunately, **the very short Conclusions at the end of the work does not do justice to the scope and aims of the work**. In it, the author still refers to individual ancient texts and fails to explain to the reader what the overall results of the work are and how they are argued for. Even the summaries of chapters in the Conclusion seem only half-ready. The conclusion ends with a list that might serve as a starting point for an interesting discussion, but now it is not developed further. Most significantly, in the Conclusions (and preferably much earlier, throughout the work and chapter conclusions) the author should return to discuss the main research question and the interesting and promising points that the author outlined in the introduction of the work.

Additionally, the text material is absolutely fascinating and gives avenues for future research; these could be explored in the Conclusions as well. For example, from the point of view of history of emotions, the material is very very rich!

Overall, the scientific significance of the results for the field in general is not explained sufficiently. However, the analysis is logical and includes interesting and different points of view. **There is no question that the results are significant for the field, it is just a question of writing this out better.**
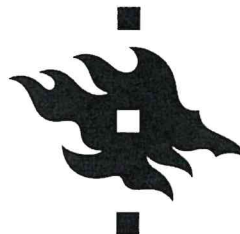
6) Format and structure

A major structural problem is the **lack of justifications for the structure of the work**. The structure of the work is very clear; same text publications are discussed in same order in all of the chapters (first Neo-Assyrian royal corresponcende, then the other corpora) but there is no clear justification why? The structure and some hints in the text suggest an aim to compare between the six groups of texts that are discussed in each chapter. There is implication also of chronological, regional and dialectic comparisons. This is however not systematically executed – instead the reader is left to try and connect the dots herself. For example the conclusions of 2.1 on page 89 discusses some of the findings of the chapter but does not connect well with speech act methods, or provide any kind of comparative approach. The other conclusions should be reviewed from this point of view as well.

A related problem are the "mini-summaries" that are interspersed in the text – these are uneven in quality and should be reviewed. For example, the short one sentence remark on p. 55 "Owing to the nature of the topics, a more generous number of threats and warnings is featured in SAA 16" leaves the reader perplexed. What is the nature of these topics and what conclusions can be drawn from that? Referring to "context" or "topics" without unpacking the chain of thought and argument is a consistent problem throughout the work. The purpose of the mini-summaries is probably to summarize previous section briefly before moving on to next subcorpus, but this is not explained fully. The short summaries would make more sense if there were more subheadings. For example, the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence is apparently reviewed king by king, but there are no subheadings or explanation of this, and very little acknowledgment that things might have changed from one century to the next. Because the chronological scope of the work is so large, it is important to be aware of the political history behind the texts – that is now rather underdeveloped. Not even regnal years of kings are given, or information on the chronological distribution of sources (eg almost all of the Neo-Assyrian letters come from the Sargonid dynasty).

The emphasis of the text is on the text exemplars. I understand the need to quote extensively to show what patterns emerge, but some of the texts could be in an appendix and the focus of the text could be more on the patterns idetified. Nor is it always clearly explained why some texts are presented in transliteration and translation and some texts only as summaries. I realize that the repetition of examplars is an argument in itself for the existence of patterns, but still, some of the text is very heavy with the text translations. This is a minor issue, however.

Another challenge throughout the work is the **lack of cross-references or at least a text index** indicating on which pages a particular text is discussed. Now the reader is faced with vague "already discussed" or "see above" or "discussed in chapter in excuses" which makes it quite cumbersum to track texts. Adding more subheadings would make cross-referencing easier as well.

Chapter **3.1 "Complaints" presents particular structural problems**. On page 134 the author states that she wll compare complaints in petitions and administrative letters and complaints in denunciations. This is a good idea, but it should then be followed throughout the chapter. Now, confusingly, one finds "A. Complaints" on page 136 which is an identical title to the chapter heading 3.1. One assumes "A." is supposed to be "complaints in petitions and administrative letters"
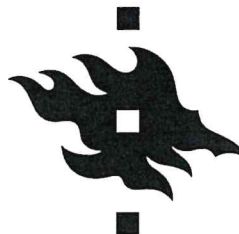
Heading "B. Denunciations" appears on p 185, should be "B. complaints in denunciations." Another question is why use A and B in the first place and not numbered headings? The A and B appear again in the subchapter "Neo-Babylonian letters in the Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence" (although heading B only appears in text, p 238, not in TOC) but in other text categories this difference is not maintained. Nor are these sections thoroughly introduced or concluded; and in the Conclusions for chapter 3.1 they are not discussed, although one would expect that.

Chapter 4.2 is not quite seamlessly connected to the whole. Despite nice introduction on pp. 333-334, the reasons for focusing on why-questions and accusations could be clarified. Also the structure of 4.2. could be explained in the beginning of the chapter.

7) Critical attitude

The writer demonstrates an admirably critical attitude towards previous research, discussing them thoroughly and adapting them to the needs of her work. The research is exemplary in its originality and innovativeness.

To conclude, I attach below a list of individual fairly minor issues that nonetheless might help improve the work.

A review of this kind is necessarily focused on things that can or should be improved, but I am overall very favorably impressed by the work. Once revised I think it makes a significant contribution in the field of Assyriology.

Respectfully,

Saana Svärd

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Minor issues

- Abbreviations and symbols are in a strange place, hidden on page 39, not in the beginning, as one would expect. "Abbreviations" is missing SAA volumes.
- Table of contents (TOC) one would expect to find at the beginning.
- Typos are still very evident, the text will profit for careful re-reading again.
- On most occasions the heading numbers that are apparent in TOC are missing in the text (eg p.41, p 134 headings).
- numbers smaller than ten should always be written in letter, "nine" not "9" etc
- footnote 24: not sure about NB women, but yes there are female scribes and literate women in Neo-Assyrian era, see Svärd "Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces" 2015
- Reference system seems cumbersome; it would be much better to refer to texts with abbreviations, eg just "SAA 5 31" not "SAA 5 31 (Lanfranchi and Parpola 19990, 23-24)" and add SAA 5 etc to the list of abbreviations. Same goes for references like "No 24 among the private letters" – best to use unambiguous short references "SbBriefe no XX" or similar and add the books to "Abbreviations."
- SAA 1 is consistently misrepresented. SAA 1 cannot be "Parpola 2015", more like 1987. This is difficult to check from bibliography as it does not include series names and series numbers. All the more reason to add the SAA volumes to the list of abbreviations.
- Footnote 78 is missing a reference, pleas add an argument or a secondary literature source
- Page 82: the practice of addressing wives as sisters? Needs a reference.
- Page 117: something wrong with translation of Lu2sar-ru-ti? Did not check the original text, but worth checking.
- Some typos had made their way to translations (eg p 197, 211, 215, 269 and more) – better double-check the translations as well
- Page 125: why is it likely that "sister" = "wife"? This is repeated here and there through the work, but not really explained
- P 158 expression "guarding the privileges of the king" – could this mean guarding the palace etiquette? Just speculation on my part, though.
- p 162 LAS is missing from list of abbreviations
- p 163 SAA 187 is presumable SAA 10 187
- P 213 disagree with the translation "Parrūṭu, a goldsmith of the household of the queen, has bought a Babylonian like the king and the crown prince, (and) settled him in his house."
Original translation makes more sense to me: ""Parruṭu, a goldsmith of the household of the queen, has, like the king and the crown prince, bought a Babylonian, and settled him in his own house."
- p 296, part of sentence missing ("Some form")