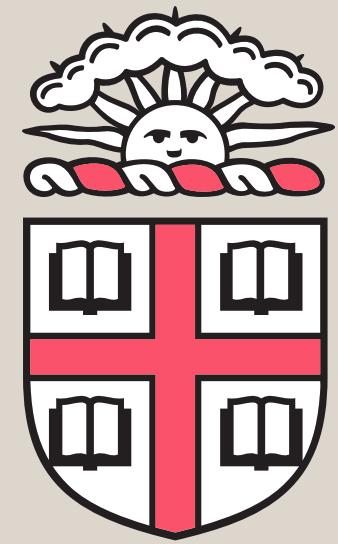


The Verb *jnj*

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Basic Meaning

inj

(III. inf.) *herbeibringen, holen.*

Kopt. *EINE: INI.*

The Wörterbuch entry for *jnj* (note the alternate glyph with a person carrying a *nw* pot forward.)

The word *jnj* has been translated into English as “bring” by most Egyptologists with very few exceptions. Even in the New Testament, where the Coptic and English versions are each separate translations from the original Greek, produced many centuries apart, *ini* and “bring” are still closely paired. More recently, however, some Egyptologists have challenged our certainty about this word’s meaning and have begun to translate *jnj* in novel ways in order to approach a more precise understanding of the nuanced meaning of the Egyptian word. In particular, Allen consistently renders the word “get” in his translations of the Pyramid Texts, in accord with another standard meaning for this word. But “get” and “bring” are different in subtle ways, and most translators seem to prefer “bring.” So which is more generally correct?

Origin of the Controversy

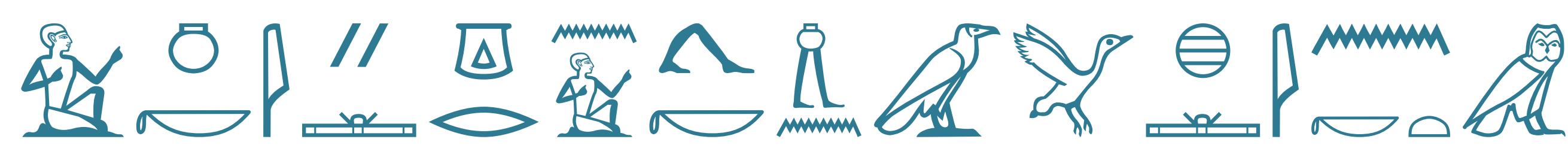
In 1964, Jaroslav Černý indirectly raised the problem of *jnj* in a discussion on an entirely unrelated feature of grammar. His observations set off a minor debate on the subject, which has not been concluded to this day. While the debate itself is certainly of great value to the ongoing study of Egyptian, it is important to note that the examples he chose were not intended to illustrate the primary meaning of the verb *jnj*, and he did not choose them at random. Instead, these examples demonstrate a very unusual property of *jnj*, namely that it can happen first in temporal sequence — i.e. “bring” can proceed “arrive”.



jn t3y.k hwt mtw.k jj

“Come and bring your chapter.” Literally: “Bring your chapter and come,” which places the events in the wrong order. (Cited in Depuydt 1993 and Černý 1964)

In 1993, Leo Depuydt took on the question of *jnj* in a short excursus in his book *Conjunction, Contiguity, Contingency*. While wrestling with the problem of how Egyptian deals with expressions of time that are adjacent or overlapping, Depuydt cites evidence that *jnj* cannot mean “fetch” in the sense of “go get and bring back” because of a particular counter-example found in Wenamoun:



mnt.k jh p3 jn.k n.j gr-jnk

“And you, what have you brought for me for my part?”

(Wenamoun 2,8) Clearly Wenamoun cannot have “fetched” anything because he has never been here.

Diachronic Universality

An important point that is often left out of the discussion of *jnj* is its ubiquity in the Egyptian language. Not only can it be found in every text of substantial length, it can also be found in every time period in which some form of Egyptian was spoken. In order to properly consider both the most usual meaning of *jnj* and any way in which its meaning might have varied over the centuries, this study relies on a selection of examples from every known stage of the Egyptian language.

	Pyramid Texts	147
Old Kingdom	Harkhuf	17
	Weni	7
First Intermediate Period	Coffin Texts	551
	The Debate between a Man and His Soul	1
Middle Kingdom	Papyrus Westcar	28
	The Shipwrecked Sailor	13
Second Intermediate Period	The Eloquent Peasant	12
	Kamose's Stela	2
New Kingdom	The Book of the Heavenly Cow	6
	The Doomed Prince	3
	The Tale of the Two Brothers	20
	The Blinding of Truth by Falsehood	5
Ramesside	The Instruction of Amenemope	10
Third Intermediate Period	The Contendings of Horus and Seth	15
Greco-Roman	The Misadventures of Wenamoun	22
Coptic	Setne Khamwaset	22
	New Testament	191
Texts used in this study, their time of composition, and the number of instances of <i>jnj</i> in each.		

A Possible Solution?

Perhaps the problem with the debate over “bring,” “fetch,” and “get” is that the Egyptian word does not accord well with any of these translations. An alternative possibility is “carry.” At first glance, the word “carry” seems an odd choice, it is much rarer in English than the other suggestions; however, it is possible that the Egyptian language placed more emphasis on the possession of the object than our language does, and that Egyptian was less concerned with marking the endpoints of the journey. Looking back at the previous examples, it becomes clear that this possibility eliminates many of the problems that plagued earlier translations. The word “carry” certainly implies “acquire” (you can’t carry something that you don’t have), and, with the addition of a prepositional phrase (e.g. “carry to me”), it includes the idea of motion demanded by the presence of the walking-legs determinative. This translation also explains the overwhelming correspondence in the New Testament between *ini* and φερέιν, where the word’s Greek counterpart is commonly translated “bear” or “carry.” Though this word is relatively uncommon in English, it is entirely possible that “carry” better captures the nuanced meaning of the Egyptian word than any other option.



dj.fjn.w n.j šp n hd nb ss n nsw jw n3-čn.w m-ss

He [Pharaoh] caused to be carried to me a present of silver, gold, royal linen, they being beautiful exceedingly. (Setne 3,6) Note that Griffith’s translation uses “carry” where “bring” and “get” would also be appropriate.

Future Research

It is unlikely that we will ever find a perfect English translation for *jnj*. The semantic spaces of words in different languages often overlap in strange and unpredictable ways, and they almost certainly fail to align perfectly. While the standard philological approach of collecting examples and comparing them is perfectly reasonable and valid, perhaps a better method for approaching this question would be to borrow techniques from the more formal study of semantics found in Linguistics. Because of the limitations of space and the poster format, this presentation relies on the first method alone, while my paper on this subject will employ both.

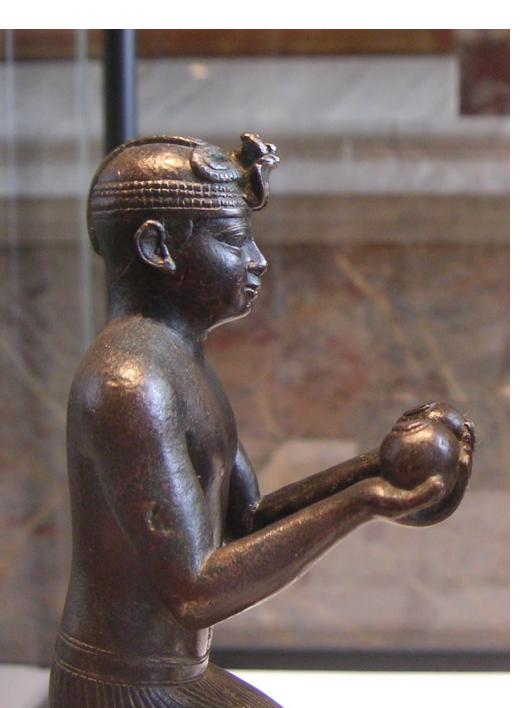


Hieroglyph

The most common hieroglyphic spelling of *jnj* uses the symbol above, which is used almost exclusively for this word and its derivatives, (which is exceptional in Egyptian, most glyphs have more than one possible use, and many have more than one phonetic value). It is composed of the *nw* pot (which has the phonetic value *nw* or *jnj*) on top of walking-legs (which is generally used as a determinative for verbs of motion and as an ideogram for the verb *jw* “to come.”)

The incorporation of the walking-legs determinative into the basic form of the sign indicates that the translation “get,” in the sense of “obtain” or “acquire,” is probably not correct, because these verbs do not require motion, while *jnj* clearly does.

It is also possible to speculate that the depiction of the *nw* pot served the word *jnj* in two ways simultaneously. While it certainly did indicate the phonetic character of the word, it was also symbolically associated with offerings to the divine, an act which the word *jnj* could be used to describe (e.g.: οὐοτ ἀνιστὶ μπεκ λωρόν εἴσοτη = “Come and offer thy gift” – Matthew 5:24). The inclusion of the *nw* pot in royal offering scenes occurs throughout the history of Pharaonic Egypt.



From left to right: Pepi I (6th Dynasty), Nefertari (19th Dynasty), and Taharqa (25th Dynasty).

Acknowledgments

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