Middle Egyptian Grammar
An Intermediate Reference Book

Jordan K. Furutani

2020

Contents

Introduction

Egyptian grammar is a complex enterprise and this overview by no means subsumes the entirety of the discussion that could be assembled on any given topic. The discussions given here detail should be sufficient to provide a student who is already acquainted with the grammar with both a review of what they know and a look into deeper levels of linguistic analysis.

I have organized the grammar below as a reference grammar, intended to be of use in actually reading texts. The language used is a blend of linguistic terminology and typical Egyptological expressions which may make it less useful to all, but I hope that it remains comprehensible. A section on terminology opens many chapters which should provide the student with enough discussion to explain terms and expressions to which they are not accustomed.

Chapter 1

Phonetics and Phonology

The study of Egyptian phonology has recently benefited from a work by James Allen *Ancient Egyptian Phonology*, 2020. His work forms the basis for most of the discussion here and, to a lesser extent, on Carsten Peust (1999). Prosody is not considered in this section as it is too problematic for the reconstruction of Middle Egyptian.

1.1 Consonants

The Egyptian consonants can be divided into five general categories. The tables below reflect the data summarized by Allen on pages 83-4.

Category	Phoneme	Grapheme	Middle Egyptian
Nasal	/m/	m	[m]
Aspirated Stop	/p/	p	[p^h/p]
Unaspirated Stop	/b/	b	[b]
Affricate	/f/	f	[f]
Approximant	/w/	w	[w/u]

Table 1.1: LabialPhonemes

The labials are all relatively simple. The phoneme /p/ may have been aspirated in some environments. The phoneme /f/ was likely an affricate at this point not a labio-dental.

Category	Phoneme	Grapheme	Middle Egyptian
Nasal	/n/	n	[n]
Unaspirated Stop	/d/	d	[t]
Aspirate Stop	/t/	t	[t^h/t]
Coronal Fricative	/s/	s	[s]
Tap	/ɾ/	r	[ɾ/j/ʔ]
Approximant	/l/	*ꜣ*	[l/j/-]

Table 1.2: Coronal Phonemes

For the coronals note that *ꜣ* was most likely pronounced as [l] or [j] in Middle Egyptian. Also note that grapheme *r* is considered more likely to be a tap /ɾ/ in most contexts and possibly a glottal stop or glide in others.

Category	Phoneme	Grapheme	Middle Egyptian
Unaspirated Stop	/d̲/	d̲	[tʲ]
Aspirated Stop	/t̲/	t̲	[tʰʲ]
Fricative	/š/	š	[ʃ]
Approximant	/j/	y	[j]

Table 1.3: Palatal Phonemes

For palatal phonemes note that /j/ is most likely not present in the Old Egyptian. Allen argues that most examples stem from CV metathesis.

Category	Phoneme	Grapheme	Middle Egyptian
Unaspirated Stop	/g/	q	[k]
Aspirated Stop	/k/	k	[kʰk]
Palatalized Stop	/k̲/	g	[kʲ]
Fricative	/x/	ḫ/h̲	[x]
Palatalized Fricative	/x̲/	h̲	[xʲ]

Table 1.4: Velar Phonemes

Category	Phoneme	Grapheme	Middle Egyptian
Pharyngeal Fricative	/ḥ/	ḥ	[ħ]
Approximant	/ʿ/	ʿ	[ʕ]
Glottal Fricative	/h/	h	[h]

Table 1.5: Laryngeal Phonemes

1.2 Vowels

Middle Egyptian vowels are grouped into the same three classes as most AA languages, a-class, i-class, and u-class. The vocalic inventory is thus to be taken as similar, if not identical, to that in LE.

1.3 Phonotactics

Egyptian phonotactics is a complex subject and is not particularly useful in this context. For a good treatment see Allen 2020, 85-94. Of interest is the fact that metathesis (the swapping of two adjacent sounds) occurs throughout the Egyptian language in unclear situations. Both CV and CC examples are attested.

Chapter 2

The Egyptian Writing System

The Egyptian system of writing is based upon the use of glyphs as logograms and phonograms. The logographic usage is especially common on stone monuments where hieroglyphs could be more accurately carved and easily distinguished. Fuller phonetic spellings are more common in hieratic where complex signs were often written in abbreviated form.

2.1 The Rebus Principle

The rebus principle is founded on the principle that many words which correspond to easily drawn concepts can also be used to form phonetic parts of a longer word. Hence, as an English example "bee" + "leaf" can render "belief." A similar process lies behind many Egyptian signs. Thus the eye-sign  (D4) can mean eye, which corresponds to the word *ir.t* and can also be used for the sound group *ir* which is used in the word *irí* "to do."

2.2 Hieroglyphic and Hieratic

The fundamental difference between these two scripts is that the former are pictures and are generally well-formed. The latter is a cursive script which was used from the Old Kingdom on papyrus or ostracon. Hieroglyphs could be drawn in a semi-cursive form on papyri, especially on Funerary-Books. This is probably linked to the idea that the recognizability of the glyphs corresponds to the effectiveness of the spell.

2.2.1 Sign Groupings

Egyptian signs are generally grouped into square *quadrats*. These groupings often involved stacking signs and can sometimes lead to unusual alterations of size to fit a particular sign in a particular context. In hieratic writings this is less common as the style demands greater clarity. A two simple examples are given below.

[1] a.  → *n=i*

b.  → *nw*

2.3 Sign Modifications

The most significant modification of signs was the drawing of headless animals in funerary corpora. These animals are generally dangerous creatures and the headless versions are used to symbolically-magically protect the deceased from their destructive power.

Specific signs could be changed in specific contexts to better fit the context in which they were written. This is a concept treated by Dmitri Meeks *et al.* in the new Hieroglyphic Palaeography series from IFAO.

2.4 Honorific Transposition

The standard practice in all scripts preceding Coptic is to place the name of either a king or god in the leading position. This transposition is not likely to be a syntactic phenomenon, but rather only appears in the written form of names. This fact was not known in the earliest period of Egyptology leading to a wide variety of transliterations. As an example the name "Senwosret" is often given as "Useretsen" in older publications. The name can be broken down as *s n.*(*y*) *wsrt* meaning "the one of Wosret."

2.5 Abbreviations and Defective Writings

The Egyptian writing system often condenses duplicate forms, e.g. *ỉr* and *ỉrr* are often indistinguishable in writing. Signs which could "play double duty" such as the seated man (A1), such as in *ỉt=ỉ* often were not repeated in inscriptions.

Abbreviations were not especially common in the Hieroglyphic script although ligatures became very common in hieratic (and later Demotic). The most common of these is the phrase ꜥ*nḫ.*(*w*) *wḏꜣ.*(*w*) *s*(*nb.w*) which is written after royal names.

2.6 Sign Values

A full explication of signs, values etc. is beyond the scope of this work, which is explicitly aimed at the grammatical. Reference should be made to other grammatical and paleographical works for the details of hieroglyphic writing.

Chapter 3

Morphology

Morphology is the study of how words are put together in a language. It is premised on the concept of a morph, which may be defined as the smallest unit of meaning in a language. Morphology is a sub-lexical study, which means it concerns itself with components that are smaller than the word itself. Morphology also interacts with the layers of linguistic theory directly below and above it, namely phonology and syntax. Morphophonemics is concerned with the phonological properties of morphs. Morphosyntax deals with how morphology conditions syntactic relationships between words.

Another important distinction in morphology is that between inflectional and derivational morphology. Derivational morphology describes morphs which convert a lemma into another. This is often associated with a shift between parts-of-speech (POS), e.g. (great, adj) $\rightarrow$ (greatness, noun). Inflectional morphology deals generally with changes within the same POS, e.g. (travel, verb present) $\rightarrow$ (travelled, verb past).

There is no particularly strong consensus within Egyptology (or Linguistics for that matter) for the indication of morphs and their attachments. I have followed the pattern of marking off inflectional morphs with a dot (.), and a suffix pronoun with an equal's sign(=).

There is obvious benefit to using such a detailed system in a morphological description but it quickly becomes cumbersome in extended transliterations of texts.

3.1 Derivational Morphology in Middle Egyptian

Egyptian shares a stem-system with other AA languages, although that system is neither well-studied or understood. We may look forward to H. Satzinger's forthcoming lexicon of Egyptian roots which will facilitate such projects.

3.2 Noun and Adjective Morphology

The Egyptian noun inflects three numbers and two genders. Masculine nouns carry no ending while feminine nouns end in a ".t" in the majority of cases. Certain feminine nouns do not have this .t, usually place names or loan-words. In table 3.1 the morphology is

expressed with the noun *sn* "brother." Note that the fem. dual form ends in .ty while the corresponding masc. form ends in .wy.

Number/Gender	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	sn	sn.t
Dual	sn.wy	sn.ty
Plural	sn.w	sn.wt

Table 3.1: Noun Morphology

Adjective forms (Table 3.2) are inflected identically to nouns and agree with the noun they modify in gender and number.

[2] a. *mdw nfr*

b. *mdw.t nfr.t*

c. *nṯr nfr*

d. *nṯr.wt nfr.wt*

Number/Gender	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	nfr	nfr.t
Dual	nfr.wy	nfr.ty
Plural	nfr.w	nfr.wt

Table 3.2: Adjective Morphology

Egyptian possessed a special form of adjective declension similar to that found in modern arabic, and therefore called nisbe (alt. nisba). These forms are an example of a derivational morph which is then inflected using the adjective declension. In Table 3.3 these forms are given fully with the relational adjective *n*. This adjective is used to form the indirect genitive. Note that the nisbe ending (-y) is almost never written with the indirect genitive.

[3] *ḥmt n.*(*y*)*.t in-it.f*

"The wife of Intef."

Number/Gender	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	n.y	n.yt
Dual	n.y.wy	n.y.ty
Plural	n.y.w	n.y.wt

Table 3.3: Nisbe Morphology

3.3 Pronoun Morphology

Egyptian, like most AA languages, has three series of pronouns. These pronouns are called independent, dependant, and suffix pronouns within Egyptology.

3.3.1 Suffix Pronouns

The suffix pronoun in ME is inflected according the the person, gender, and number. The first person does not distinguish between masculine and feminine. Dual forms are rare but do occur especially in the 3rd person. The convention of marking this attachment with an equals sign hides the true syntactic relationship of these forms to their host verb. Evidence from Coptic indicates that most of the consonantal forms would have been attached with a broad [ɛ] sound, =i marks something like the sound [ji^{j}]. For a complete paradigm see Table 3.4.

	Masculine	Feminine
1st Person Singular	=i	=i
2nd Person Singular	=k	=t or =t̲
3rd Person Singular	=f	=s
1st Person Dual	*=ny	*=ny
2nd Person Dual	=ky	*=ty
3rd Person Dual	=fy	=sy
1st Person Plural	=n	=n
2nd Person Plural	=t̲n or =tn	=t̲n or =tn
3rd Person Plural	=sn	=sn

Table 3.4: Suffix Pronouns

3.3.2 Dependent Pronouns

The series of dependent pronouns are referred to as “clitic pronouns” in linguistic literature. This is based on the fact that this pronoun group all display clitic behaviour in their relationships to verbs. The morphology is not difficult, nor does it display any morpho-phonemic characteristics. For a paradigm see Table 3.5.

	Masculine	Feminine
1st Person Singular	wi	wi
2nd Person Singular	t̲w	t̲n
3rd Person Singular	sw	sy
1st Person Plural	n	n
2nd Person Plural	t̲n	t̲n
3rd Person Plural	sn / st	sn / st

Table 3.5: Dependant Pronouns

3.3.3 Independent Pronoun

The independent pronouns are so named for their ability to function as free syntactic units. These forms are clearly related to their later Coptic forms and but should not be pronounced identically in this period. The characteristic feature of these pronouns is the leading *nt-*. The 1cp form must be viewed as irregular perhaps stemming from metathesis in some ancestor form. The paradigm is located in Table 3.6.

	Masculine	Feminine
1st Person Singular	ink	ink
2nd Person Singular	ntk	nt̲t̲
3rd Person Singular	ntf	nts
1st Person Plural	inn	inn
2nd Person Plural	nt̲t̲n	nt̲t̲n
3rd Person Plural	ntsn	ntsn

Table 3.6: Independent Pronouns

3.4 Verbal Morphology

Egyptian verbal morphology raises an interesting series of issues well discussed in Loprieno 1995 72-3. Two main classification of verbs can be identified according to whether the subject is indicated by the verbal form. Those which do are called finite verbs and those which do not are called non-finite verbal forms.

3.4.1 Classification of Verbal Stems

Stems in ME are classified according to their consonants. The fundamental features are the number of consonants, the presence of a weak final consonant or a geminated second consonant. This produces a brief series of common root terms.

2rad. A stem with 2 strong radicals.

2ae inf. The second radical 2nd weak (*inf.* representing Latin *infirmae*).

2ae gem. The second radical geminates.

3rad. A stem with 3 strong radicals.

3ae inf. The third (and final) radical is weak.

It should be possible to discern from this all other stem patterns.

3.4.2 Finite Verbal Forms

Both of these forms in Egyptian are suffix conjugations. The former uses the suffix pronouns (Table 3.4) and the latter uses a special set of endings. The basic paradigm for these forms is found in table 3.7.

The sḏm=f

The sḏm=f could take an additional morph to indicate a past tense (see further under semantics) '*.n*'. Three other morphs, *.in*, *.kꜣ*, and *.ḫr* are used less commonly but attest to the prevalence of the pattern STEM.INFLECTION=SUFFIX-PRONOUN in earlier and proto- Egyptian.

[4] a. sḏm=f → "he hears"

b. sḏm.n=f → "he heard"

The sḏm.in=f and sḏm.kꜣ=f both represent variations of the continuative in Middle Egyptian, typically they may be translated as "(And) Then he heard." The sḏm.ḫr=f is still a poorly understood form usually rendered similarly.[1]

The passive voice is formed with the suffix *.tw* in the present and *.w* in the past tense. Again this *.w* is rarely written.

[5] a. sḏm.tw=f → "he is heard"

b. sḏm.w=f → "he was heard"

Note that the presence of a suffix is generally conditioned on the lack of a distinct subject NP.

[6] a. sḏm=f → "he hears"

b. sḏm s → "a man hears"

The Stative

The stative forms (also called the old perfective) require the use of an NP to indicate the subject.

[7] *ỉw=f sḏm.w*

[8] *ỉw s sḏm.w*

This has the effect of placing the subject ahead of the verb, a feature which becomes more common in Later Egyptian. Plural forms are rare and final /w/ is rarely written.

[1] For a good discussion see Vernus *Future at Issue*.

Finite Verbal Forms	Suffix Conjugation	Stative Conjugation
1st Person Singular	sḏm=i	sḏm.kw
2nd Person Singular	sḏm=k	sḏm.ti
3rd Person Singular	sḏm=f	sḏm.w
1st Person Plural	sḏm=n	sḏm.win
2nd Person Plural	sḏm=Tn	sḏm.twin
3rd Person Plural	sḏm=sn	sḏm.w / .ti

Table 3.7: Egyptian Finite Verbal Forms

3.4.3 Expansions of the sḏm=f

In a number of grammars there is a discussion of the prospective sḏm=f.[2] This is taken to be a part of the verbal-system which the sḏm=f occupies. The prospective sḏm=f has almost no discernible morphological difference to the regular sḏm=f. Note that the verb *ỉi* will always appear as *ỉw*, *ỉni* will appear with a -t ending *ỉnt*, and rdi will appear as di. There is also the rare form *mɜ3n* for *mɜ33*. No gemmination occurs in the Prospective sḏm=f.

3.4.4 Non-Finite Verbal Forms

There are four primary non-finite verbal forms which will be discussed below.

Infinitives

Infinitives are a nominal form of the verbal stem. Depending on the stem-class the infinitive will have either masculine or feminine morphological features.

2rad. Masculine, *ḏd* “speaking”

Caus. 2rad. Feminine, *smn.t* “establishing”

3rad. Masculine, *sḏm* “hearing”

3ae inf. Feminine, *ḥs.t* “sining”

2ae gem. Masculine, with gemination, *mɜ33* “seeing”

4ae inf. Feminine, *ḥms.t* “sitting”

Participles

In general ME participles mark voice and aspect but do not mark tense. The future participle is an external form which functions identically to a participle although it explicitly marks the subject making it a possible candidate for treatment as a finite form.[3] The main pattern

[2] For a good discussion see Allen 1984, 120.

[3] There is no consensus on the origins of the sḏm.ty.fy, but it is generally agreed that it cannot claim the same origin as the other participles.

that should be noted is that gemination occurs in the imperfective forms and the IPP is marked by the addition of a -w. The PAP and PPP are usually indistinguishable apart from context. The participle forms are listed in table 3.8.

Root Type	3rad.	2ae inf.	2ae gem.	irreg.	irreg.	irreg.	irreg.	irreg.	2rad.
Stem	sḏm	hꜣi	ḫnn	ii/iw	ini	rdi	wnn	mꜣꜣ	ḫm
IAP	sḏm	hꜣꜣ	ḫnn	ii	inn	dd	wnn	mꜣꜣ	ḫmm
IPP	sḏm.w	hꜣꜣ.w	ḫnn.w	ii.w	Inn.w	dd.w	wnn.w	mꜣꜣ.w	ḫmm.w
PAP	sḏm	hꜣ	ḫn	ii, iy, iw	in	rdi (di)	wn.w	mꜣ	ḫm
PPP	sḏm	hꜣ	ḫn	ii, iy, iw	in	rdi (di)	wn.w	mꜣ	ḫm (ḫm.y)
FUT	sḏm.ty	hꜣ.ty	ḫnn.ty	iw.ty	in.ty	rdi.ty	wnn.ty	mꜣꜣ.ty	ḫm.ty

Table 3.8: Participle Forms

Hoch adds to his consideration of the Participle a discussion of a prospective particle, also in active and passive variations. There no clear distinction for this participle on a morphological level nor does it have a clear place in the verbal system. Hoch's description of the prospective participle leaves much to be desired and I have not found much evidence for it outside of his examples (cf. Hoch lesson 10).

Very rare are certain 2-lit forms which show gemination in PPP: rḫḫy "one who is known" etc. cf. Hoch p. 136. The participle is described in detail in Gardiner §353-361. Gardiner does not, however, describe a prospective participle.

Relatives

The relative form is morphologically identical with the participle. The relative form however marks the subject with a suffix pronoun and can be made past tense through the addition of the suffix -n.

[9] a. sḏm=f "What he heard"

b. ḫmm=s "What she does not know"

c. sḏm.n=f "What he had heard"

d. ḫmm.n=s "What she did not know"

Negatival Complement

The negatival complement appears as a result of the Egyptian word *tm* "to not." Its syntactic function will be described later, but the features of its morphology are not difficult. A table for forms is found in table 3.9

The Imperative Forms

Egyptian imperatives are often marked for number in Middle Egyptian, typically with plural strokes. Strong verbs do not take any particular form in the imperative. Words with *3ae inf.*

Stem/Class	sḏm	3ae inf	2ae gem	ii/iw	ini	rdi	wnn	mꜣꜣ
Negatival Complement	sḏm	hꜣ.w	ḫnnw.	ini.w	iw.w	rdi(w)	wnn(w)	mꜣꜣ.w

Table 3.9: Negatival Complement

.

and *2ae gem.* stems use only the first two consonants. An exception to this is *mꜣꜣ* which appears both with and without gemination.

Several special anomalous forms appear in the imperative however. The imperative of *ỉw*/*ỉỉ* is *mỉ* and the imperative of *rdỉ* is *ỉmỉ*. There is also the form *ỉś* which is a variant imperative of *šm* more common in earlier texts.

3.4.5 The Emphatic Forms

A critical part of the discussion surrounding the ME verbal system is the problem of the emphatic forms. In later Egyptian emphatic forms are both nominal and clearly inflected, this is not a point which is generally disputed.[4] In earlier Egyptian it is also generally agreed that certain sentences were "emphatic." The debate of the last 30-years has orbited around the problem of whether or not these forms are marked, either morphologically or syntactically.

The common idea is that the geminate forms, especially of *2ae inf.*, indicate the emphatic use of the verb (Hoch §147). James Allen (2011) has argued that this pattern is lexical and not inflectional. Hoch's morphology is included in Table 3.10 for reference.

Stem/Class	sḏm	3ae inf	2ae gem	ii/iw	ini	rdi	wnn	mꜣꜣ
Second Tense Form	sḏm	hꜣꜣ	ḫnn	iw	inn	dd	wnn	mꜣꜣ

Table 3.10: Second Tense Forms

[4] cf. CGG §??.

Chapter 4

Morphosyntax

4.1 General Parts of Speech

Morphosyntax covers the division between morphology and syntax, the most important part of which is the description of parts of speech. We may begin our discussion here with the universal parts of speech used in typological tagging in table 4.1.

Open Class	Closed Class	Other
ADJ	ADP	PUNCT
ADV	AUX	SYM
INTJ	CCONJ	X
NOUN	DET	
PROPN	NUM	
VERB	PART	
	PRON	
	SCONJ	

Table 4.1: Universal Part of Speech Tags

4.1.1 Open Class

Adjectives and adverbs are related to a governing noun or verb respectively which they modify. In ME adjectives indicate this agreement through taking the number and gender of the governing noun. Egyptian adverbs do not show any distinct morphological features.

Interjections are rare in Egyptian but a few appear such as *iḫ*. Nouns and Proper Nouns are self-explanatory. Verbs represent main-verbs as well as verbally functioning infinitives.

4.1.2 Closed Class

ADP represents 'Adposition' which summarizes both prepositions and post-positions. Middle Egyptian does not have any lexical post-positions (*im* and *ỉry* will occasionally function

as post-positions) but prepositions are plentiful. Auxiliaries are types of non-main verbs. Auxiliaries become much more important in later Egyptian.

The two types of conjunction are coordinating and subordinating. They differ in the that coordinating conjunctions bring together syntactic units of the same level. While subordinating conjunctions create a lower level phrase.

Particles

There are many particles in ME with most serving a mix of syntactic and pragmatic (i.e. discourse) functions.

Pronouns

Egyptian possesses three series of pronouns as discussed above. These have not only distinct morphological but also distinct syntactic functions.

4.1.3 Other Parts of Speech

Middle Egyptian lacks a symbolic system for the use of SYM, in Coptic there are certain *sigla* which can use this tag. X allows for rare exceptions which do not occur in Egyptian. Punctuation is a complex issue. The use of verse points is clearly a form of punctuation.

4.2 Syntactic Implications of Verbal Morphology

The most common factor which will appear here is the use of non-finite verbal forms as nouns. infinitives, participles, and relatives can all be used as nouns in a variety of syntactic positions. Thus nominal sentence can and frequently do included verbals forms.

4.3 Morphosyntactic Glossing

The golden standard in glossing is held by the Leipzig glossing rules. Modifications to those rules allow for Morphosyntactic glossing of Egyptian texts. Such modifications are provided in an article from 2009 which should be referenced for texts desired to use such a format.[1] This grammar uses a more conventional system more closely related to that used within Egyptian philology.

4.4 Clitic vs. Affix

The difference between a clitic and an affix is well represented by the issue of the suffix pronouns. Because they appear with nouns, verbs, and prepositions there is an argument

[1] Camilla Di Biase-Dyson, Frank Kammerzell, and Daniel Werning, "Glossing Ancient Egyptian: Suggestions for Adapting the Leipzig Glossing Rules," *Lingua Aegyptia* 17 (2009): 343–66.

to made for considering them clitics (Example 10). Alternatively they could be considered regular inflectional morphs and marked accordingly (Example 11).

[10] *sꜣ=i=pw*

"He is my son"(Berlin 1157, 16)

[11] *sꜣ.i=pw*

"He is my son"(Berlin 1157, 16)

Neither analysis affects translation; this book follows Di Biase-Dyson et al. in marking them as clitics.[2]

4.5 Subject and Object Marking

Recall that there are three types of verbal argument, transitive subject, intransitive subject, and transitive object.

In the suffix conjugation *sḏm=f* the dependent pronoun is used to indicate a pronominal transitive object. If the direct object is a noun then the object is marked by position. The nominal subject is marked by position, directly after the noun with any pronominal objects in between.

4.5.1 Subjects and Objects of Non-Finite Verbs

The case of the non-finite verbal forms is interesting. They mark their subjects and objects differently than the suffix conjugation and differently from each other.

Infinitive

The infinitive takes a suffix pronoun as its pronominal direct object.

[12] *iw bꜣk=i r sḏm=k* "My servant will listen to you."

A nominal object of the infinitive is marked by position after the infinitive. The subject, when it is nominal, appears before the infinitive. If a pronominal subject is desired it is suffixed to the particle *iw*.

[13] *iw=i r sbꜣ bꜣk=i* "I will teach my servant."

Participle

Relative

[2] Note that according to the Leipzig glossing rules the above sentence would be given as *sꜣ-i=pw*, as a dash is used to mark segmentable morphemes.

Chapter 5

Syntax

The syntax of the Egyptian sentence can be safely divided into the two broad camps of verbal and non-verbal syntax. The latter can be divided into nominal and adverbial syntax. Non-Verbal sentences have been thoroughly described in a recent publication by Loprieno, Muller, and Uljas. The discussion of these forms of syntax are derived from that volume. Many of the examples are drawn from their discussion. All have been checked and retranslated according to my own style.

5.1 Terminology

A few terms in this section will be used quite heavily which may not already be familiar to the student. The first is the convention of labeling various phrase-level constituents with a XP abbreviation. Thus a "Noun Phrase" is abbreviated as NP and a verb phrase as a VP. These abbreviations are common throughout works on linguistic syntax.

A term which is often used in Egyptian linguistics, but which many do not actually know, is the term clitic. Clitic refers to a morph or lemma which is bound to another that precedes it. The line between clitic and suffix is that a suffix is understood to have become a part of the word to which it attaches while a clitic is merely bound to it. Thus the dependant pronouns are called clitic pronouns.

The types of sentence below are arranged and listed according to the production scheme, a concept which deserves a certain amount of explanation. One way in which syntactic structures can be conceived is as a series of replacement procedures where each step produces a greater level of syntactic detail until the find lemmas are produced.

An example will be helpful in demonstrating this concept. In the first step we see that S, which stands for sentence *produces* an NP (Noun Phrase) and a VP (Verbal Phrase). Step 2 shows that the NP is in turn composed of (=produces) a determiner (DET) and a noun (N). Steps 3 and 4 are called *lexical productions* because they provide the actual words of the sentence. For the sake of simplicity step 5 gives the simplest possible production for a VP, just a verb. This allows step six to be our final step and give us a lexical production for V. Obviously, many other productions may be possible, but only the one used is given. This analysis can be expressed using a tree diagram (Figure 5.1).

The first production "S $\rightarrow$ NP VP" is a basic classification of sentence type. The dis-

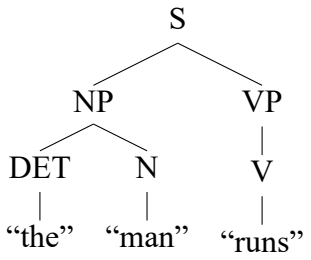


Figure 5.1: “The man runs” Tree Diagram

cussion below is oriented around such schematic descriptions of sentence type.

1. S → NP VP
2. NP → DET N
3. DET → “the”
4. N → “man”
5. VP → V
6. V → “runs”

5.2 Sub-nominal Syntax

The syntax of noun phrases themselves is an important point before advancing to more complex sentences. The Egyptian noun phrase is built around a noun or it’s syntactic equivalent. Certain Verbal phrases can be nested into this position, key examples are relative clauses, infinitives, and participles. The basic nominal element does not take a syntactic marker of determination before Late Egyptian. The most common form of nominal modification is through an adjective.

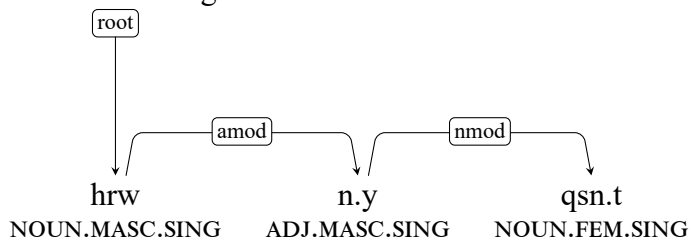
[14] a. *ḥrw pn* “this day”
b. *ḥrw nfr* “good day”
c. *mdw.t nfr.t* “good word”

Note that the adjective follows the modified noun and agrees in gender and number. The genitival adjective also follows the governing noun and agrees with it in gender and number. Thus it is analyzed as modifying that word. This is expressed in example 15.

[15] *ḥrw n*(*y*) *ḳsn.t*

“the day of woe”, *mim*. “The day *which is of* Ra” (Amenemhat 3b)

The dependency structure is important to consider here. Note that n.y is headed by hrw and thus agrees with it while qsn.t is analyzed as being commanded by n.y. In this expression if n.y was dependent on qsn.t instead of hrw then the form would be n.yt, as qsn.t is feminine singular.



Consider also here that non-finite verbal phrases can, in certain situations, take the place of a noun phrase.

[16] *sḏm pw m pr* "the one who listens is in the house."

5.3 Nominal Syntax

5.3.1 S → [NP NP]

ME, like many AA languages did not require the use of a copular verb. Thus, simple sentences of this form where one NP is the subject and the other predicate are possible although rare.

[17] *bw.t=i wsš.t*

"Urine is an abomination of mine"(CT III, 171f)

A particularly common example occurs in the identification of names. It is also found as a composition principle of names.

[18] *iw wn nḏs ḏdi rn=f*

"There is a freeman, his name is Djedi."(pWestcar 6, 26-7,1)

[19] *sbk-nb=f*

"Sobeknebef" literally, "Sobek is his lord."(RPN I, 304.14)

This is also formed with an independent pronoun.

[20] *ntk it n.(y) nmḥ*

"You are a father of the orphan"(Peas. B1, 93)

[21] *ỉnk ḥꜣt rmṯ pḥwy rmṯ*

"I am the beginning of men and the end of men"(Mo'alla IIa2)

It is also possible with interrogative pronouns.

[22] *ṯwt m*

"Who are you"(CT III 95)

When the second position is occupied by a demonstrative pronoun the it shows clitic behaviour. Note that the pronoun divides the genitive construction.

[23] *wꜣ.wt=nw n.t wsỉr*

"These are roads of Osiris"(CT VII 282b)

LMU argue that this stems from analogy with *=pw* which is a second position clitic subject / copula element. Note here that the demonstratives found in this type of construction are all in the n-series which (with *pꜣ* and *tꜣ*) are the only set of earlier Egyptian demonstratives to be used as nouns (LMU 293).

Other forms of NP can also function in this position in such sentences.

[24] *iḫ ỉrt=s r=ṯn*

"What could she do to you?"(Heq. I, v0 15)

[25] *m=tr=ṯw*

"Who are you"(CT V 68j)

It is important to note that not all scholars agree that such sentences should be considered nominal. Vernus (2006) and Winand (1999) have both argued that a sentence such as 8 or 9 should be viewed as adjectival. LMU argue (p. 294) that the presence of the clitic (re: dependant) pronoun in 9 only indicates that the clitic is used whenever the pronoun appears in second position.

Sentences of the form [NP NP] could also be formed with an active participle as the second NP to form a special type of cleft sentence. Such sentences are introduced with the particle "in".

[26] *ỉn ḥm=f rdỉ ỉr.t(w)=f*

"It was his majesty who caused it to be done"(Sin. B 308)

There have been arguments that the NP-NP construction was at one time normative for Egyptian nominal sentences (Gundacker 2010; contra Schenkel 2008). On occasion the form [NP NP] can appear as NP=sw. This form is extremely rare and possibly ungrammatical.

[27] *ink=wi spsn*

"I am of my self!"(CT VII 495h)

Possessive sentences in the [NP NP] form also appear.

[28] *n=wi rˁ*

"I belong to ra"(pEbers 1,7-8)

[29] *n=sw mḥ 30*

"He was 30 cubits"(Shipwrecked Sailor 62-3)

Such sentences are traditionally treated as adjectival sentences (Satzinger 1986: 143-145). The genitival "n" being understood as a nisbe-adjective. The exact status of these sentences is the subject of sufficient debate that they will be left out at this point see LMU for further discussion and bibliography.

5.3.2 S → [NP SE]

The more common form of nominal sentence in earlier Egyptian uses a grammaticalized subject element pw. This element has been called many things but is most often simply referred to as "pw".

[30] *sḫty=pw n.(y) sḫt ḥmʒt*

"He was a peasant of Wadi el-Natrun."(Peas. R 1,1)

Note that *=pw* takes second position breaking the genitive clause.

[31] *ḥmt wˁb=pw n.(y) rˁ*

"She is the wife of a priest of Ra."(pWestcar 9,9)

Here the unit *ḥmt wˁb* remains unbroken but *=pw* displaces the remainder of the NP. The subject element can also appear after an extended clause.

[32] *mhh ib=f=pw mi nty ḫr sḫʒ.t k.t md.t*

"This means that his heart is oblivious, like one who is thinking of something else."(pEbers 102, 15-16)

[33] *gnn sp.ty wbn.w=f=pw*

"This means that the edges of his wound are soft"(pEdwin Smith 6,13)

In both of these examples *=pw* follows the subject of a intransitive circumstantial verb. This may be compared with a transitive example.

[34] *ḫpr rn=f=pw n.*(*y*) *mỉw*

"This is how his name of 'cat' came about."(CT IV 288b)

The predicate of this bipartite form may also be a simple noun phrase.

[35] *sꜣ=ỉ=pw*

"He is my son"(Berlin 1157, 16)

Pronouns, both independent and interrogative, can also fill this position.

[36] *ntf=pw ỉnk=pw tspḫr*

"He is he and I am he - and vice versa"(BD 64/Nebseni pl. 72, 8)

[37] *sy=ty=pw tm=pw ỉm.*(*y*) *ỉtn=f*

"Who is he? He is Atum who is in his disc."(CT IV 191c-d)

The participle, which is rendered as a non-attributive relative clause, is another valid predicate. Note that =pw appears after the direct object and before the indirect object.

[38] *swsḫ tꜣš.w=pw*

"He is one who extends borders"(Sin B 71)

[39] *mk ỉrrt=sn=pw r sḫty.w=sn*

"See, it is what they do to their peasants."(Peas B1 76)

The infinitive, as a nominal form, also appears regularly.

[40] *ḥḥy=pw r ꜣḳ grg=pw*

"It is courting disaster, it is falsehood."(Khakheperreseneb R6)

Finite, Non-Relative Verbal, and Adverbial Predicates

[LMU 367-381] A key feature of this sentence type in ME is the ability to place various VPs in the predicate position. The most common of these expressions is the explanatory *sḏm=f* (32, 33). The *sḏm.n=f* is also attested here.

[41] *ḥtm.n.tw smꜣ.yt swty=pw*

"This means that the associates of Seth were eradicated"(BD 18/Nu pl. 9,5)

Very rare are examples with a leading complementizer.

[42] *nt(t)=pw mdw=f ḫnt m.tw n.w ꜥ.t nb.t*

"This is that it speaks out of the vessels of each member."(pEbers 99, 5)

LMU argue (p. 377) that such cases should be viewed as pw separating the standard complementizer from the rest of its clause. Even a subordinate bipartite pw can appear as the predicate.

[43] *ink=pw=pw ỉnk ḥr ỉnk wsỉr tm*

"It means 'it is me.' I am Horus; I am Osiris and Atum."(CT VI 63h-j)

5.3.3 S → [NP COP NP]

In ME the copula element is identical to the subject element in the bipartite pw sentence.

[44] *ink=pw=s(y) stt=pw=(w)ỉ*

"I am it, and it s me"(CT VII 157c)

[45] *ḳnt=pw ꜥḏ ḫst=pw ḫmḫt*

"To attack is to be brave, to retreat is to be timid."(Berlin 1157, 8)

This sentence type is the dominant form for expressing a relationship between two NPs or their syntactic equivalents.

[46] *bw.t=ỉ=pw ꜥḳ r nm.t*

"My abomination is to enter the god's execution place."(CT V 59c)

[47] *bỉȝ.t=ỉ=pw nȝ m wnmȝ*

"This was truly characteristic for me"(Urk. IV 973, 10)

[48] *ḥm=pw mȝꜥ ȝr.w ḥr tȝš=f*

"The one driven from his border is the true coward."(Berlin 1157, 4-5)

The adverb *ỉm* is cliticised in such sentences, functioning as a post-position.

[49] *ḫpr.t=ỉm=pw 3*

"What results from it is 3."(pUC 32162 1, 11)

The narrative past in ME literature is often expressed in these sentences as well.

[50] *prt=pw ỉrỉ.n=f r ḥrw*

"So he went on higher (*mim*: to go out higher is what he did)"(Peas B1, 35)

5.3.4 Initial and Coordinate Clauses

Auxiliaries are relatively uncommon with the nominal sentence, although some examples can be given.

[51] *ỉw grt ỉnk ỉrỉ ḥry-tp mḏḥ.w rwd.t*

"Now, it was me who acted as the head of hewers of sandstone."(Munich Gl. W.A.F 31, 6-7)

[52] *ỉw ỉr dd.t ḥr nbw dbn šʿty 12=pw*

"As for what is given for a deben of gold, it is 12 *šʿty*."(pRhind math. n.62, 4)

The use of *ỉw* in example 51 is strange but is presumably linked to the discourse function of the particle.

5.3.5 Negation of Nominal Sentences

Nominal sentences in Middle Egyptian are negated with the negative particle *n*= and usually a particle *ỉs*.

5.4 Adverbial Syntax

[53]

""()

5.5 Adjectival Syntax

[54]

""()

5.6 Verbal Syntax

5.6.1 Sentence Initial Position

In the standard theory of Egyptian syntax finite verbal forms cannot occupy first position in an sentence. This is partially drawn from the reality that many sentences open with a particle or non-finite form and leads the habit of translating with innumerable circumstantial clauses.

Thus under the standard model example 55 is grammatical while 56 is not. The particle-less clause is placed in circumstantial relation to the preceding (57).

[55] *iw s m pr*

[56] **s m pr*

[57] *iw sDm=i n it=f s m pr*

"I was listening to his father while a man was in the house

[58] *nḥm =k ppy pn m-ʿ ṯ͗s wsf.w ʿnḫ šṯn.w nṯr.w*
VERB PRON PROPN ADJ ADP NOUN VERB NOUN NOUN NOUN
↑

"May you save him from the phrase of those who delay life, the turtles of the gods."(Pepi I Pyr. 1555a)

[59]

""()

Chapter 6

Semantics

Semantics is the region of linguistics where the specifics of how information is encoded into words, phrases, and sentences, is considered. At its most broad it represents the study of meaning but this is generally narrowed into specific subfields.

Three main semantic issues will be considered in this section. 1) *Lexical Semantics*, the meanings of words and how those meanings are encoded. 2) *Grammatical Emphasis*, the use of grammatical features to mark out certain words, phrases or clauses are emphasized. 3) Verbal Tense, Aspect, and Mood - the way in which certain types of very important verbal information is encoded in a sentence.

6.1 Lexical Semantics

In lexical semantics there are a number of key features. The first is the idea of a 'lexeme' the fundamental word-unit which is definable in a dictionary. Lexicography has varied in how different lexemes ought to be. For example trivially derivable forms, such as a plural or dual form, are generally not considered different lexemes. On the other hand the pattern in Semitic linguistics for some time was to consider the base root as the fundamental unit of meaning and all the derived forms would be listed under it. This has led to a distinction between the 'root' and the 'lemma' where the root is understood to be a semantically and morphologically more basic entity but the lemma is the unit from which no non-trivial derivations are made.

Also within the bounds of lexical semantics is the irregular behavior of inflectional morphology and certain syntactic features, such as prepositional affinities and semantic variation associated with different syntactic usages. Thus a Greek lexicon will inform you that μετά means 'with' when it is used with the genitive and means 'after' when it is used with an accusative.[1]

Egyptian lexicography leaves much to be desired as yet, but this does not mean that we are without tools. The *Wörterbuch der Ägyptische Sprache*, which was edited during the first half of the twentieth century is still the standard reference for Egyptian words. Modern lexical databases such as the *TLA* are deeply linked to the Berlin *Wörterbuch* in both form and content.

[1] e.g. BDAG 647.

6.1.1 Sense Units and Lemmas

Lemmas tend to occur with multiple senses, such as *ḥsi* which means both 'praise' and 'favour.'[2] These senses should not be confounded with one another, i.e., the word *ḥsi* should not be thought of as meaning a combination of 'favour' and 'praise' but rather that both of those semantic categories can be filled by the word *ḥsi*.

Semantic Range and Semantic Field

This raises the issue of semantic range and semantic field. A semantic field is a given semantic area which may cover a number of different words. As an example the semantic field RIVER covers the concepts of a large flowing body of water, the Egyptian words *ỉtrw* and *ḥꜥpy* are both covered by this semantic field.

As an example of semantic range the word *ḥꜥpy*[3] is also a reference to the King and a Divinity and thus can be linked certainly to the field DIVINE the usage for King is likely to be metaphorical throughout. It must also be noted that RIVER is a member of the larger category BODY OF WATER. This nesting of semantic fields and their overlap creates an interesting challenge for analysis of lexical sense.

Metaphor

A common area of semantic expansion for a lexeme is through metaphorical usage. Such usages occur whenever a word is stretched beyond its usual semantic range. Metaphors are a common phenomenon throughout Egyptian literature.

6.2 The Semantic Sentence: Subject and Predicate

While syntax describes the proper form of a sentence, one of the functions of semantics is to analyze the way that meaning is encoded into the sentence. Central to this is the notion of subject and predicate which are the semantic building blocks that make up every sentence.

By way of simple definition we may say the following, the subject is what is being described in the sentence and the predicate is that description. Subjects are, almost by definition, nominal; predicates vary widely in part of speech. The chapter on syntax above considered the sentence classified by the type of predicate, which is the most common method in linguistics. Thus the Nominal sentence is a sentence with a nominal predicate; the adverbial sentence is a sentence with an adverbial predicate.

[60] The boy went to school.

In this sentence "the boy" is the subject and "went to school" is the predicate. Note that both the verb and the indirect object are part of the predicate.

[2] CDME 176.
[3] Wb 3, 42f.

[61] *ink iri ḳd=f*

"I am one who acted according to his character"(BM EA 159, 12)

In the nominal sentence above *ink* is the subject and *iri ḳd=f* is the nominal predicate. Note that *iri* is a participle here and it may thus be understood to be functioning as a noun.

6.3 Subject and Predicate in the Nominal Sentence

In this section the semantics of the nominal sentence will be briefly described using the same divisions used in the chapter on syntax.

6.3.1 S → [NP NP]

In sentences of this type there is no formal distinction, syntactic or morphological, to indicate which of the NPs is the subject. This may be determined through context as the subject will generally be the most definite, animate, and agentitive entity in the sentence. In some cases this is impossible to determine.

[17, repeated] *bw.t=i wsš.t*

"Urine is an abomination of mine" or "An abomination of mine is urine."(CT III, 171f)

In example 19 however it is clear that "Sobek" should be the subject.

[19, repeated] *sbk-nb=f*

"Sobeknebef" literally, "Sobek is his lord."(RPN I, 304.14)

When the first element is the independent pronoun, that pronoun is to be viewed as the subject. In example 62 *ink* is clearly the subject. The reverse: "A scribe who ... am I" is an unnecessary circumlocution which is foreign to the text.

[62] *ink sš mrr.y=s ir mrr.t=s rˁ nb*

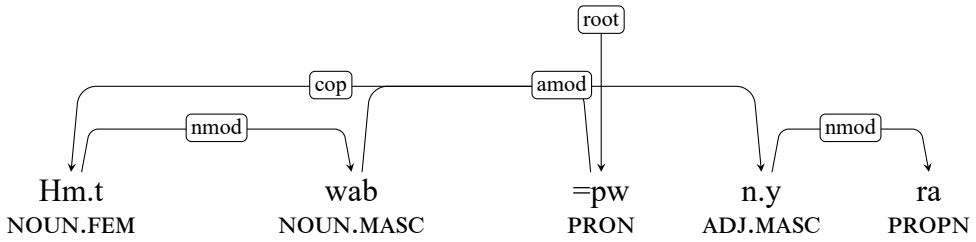
"I am a scribe who she loves and one who does what she loves every day." (CT VI 130a M3C)

6.3.2 S → [NP SE]

Because this type of sentence contains a subject element there is no question as to how the subject and predicate are arranged. Example 31 shows this clearly.

[31, repeated] *ḥmt wʿb=pw n.(y) rʿ*

"She is the wife of a priest of Ra."(pWestcar 9,9)



Note that the relationship between =pw and Hmt is copular. The direct genitive is unbroken by the clitic *=pw* but it attaches to the first valid word.

Sentence which utilize this schema in the "this means that ..." construction are another good example of the clear marking of the subject. Example 32 demonstrates the full verbal sentence being embedded as the predicate.

[32, repeated] *mhh ib=f=pw mi nty ḥr sḫ3.t k.t md.t*

"This means that his heart is oblivious, like one who is thinking of something else."(pEbers 102, 15-16)

6.3.3 S → [NP COP NP]

Sentences of this type face the same problems as sentences of the type [NP NP] as there is no definitive marker of the subject the subject will be ambiguous apart from context and the same semantic features as described above.

Hoch analyzes this sentence type as [NP SE NP], mimetically rendered as "it is A, namely B." This analysis is likely an oversimplification.

6.4 Emphasis as a Semantic Feature

Emphasis is fundamentally a feature of the semantics of a given language. The emphasis may be marked in a number of ways ranging from morphology to style.

6.5 Information Structure in Adverbial Sentences

6.6 Information Structure in Adjectival Sentences

6.7 Tense, Aspect, and Mood

6.8 Information Structure in Verbal Sentences

An Annotated Bibliography On Various Linguistic Topics

Bibliography on Phonetics and Phonology

Allen, James P. *Ancient Egyptian Phonology*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Allen's analysis of Egyptian phonology represents the latest effort in this ongoing area of scholarly endeavor. The discussion of prosody is the most lacking section and reference must still be made to Fecht's monumental studies.

Fecht, Gerhard. "Die Form Der Altägyptischen Literatur: Metrische Und Stilistische Analyse." *Zeitschrift Für Ägyptische Sprache Und Altertumskunde* 91 (1964): 11–63.

———. *Wortakzent Und Silbenstruktur: Untersuchungen Zur Geschichte Der Ägyptischen Sprache*. Vol. 21. Ägyptologische Forschungen. Glückstadt: Augustin, 1960.

In these two works, the first a book and the later an article Fecht provides the most detailed study of prosody and syllable structure to yet be done. Fecht's key conclusion is that the Egyptian poetic line was made up of 2-3 prosodic units.

Peust, Carsten. *Egyptian Phonology: An Introduction to the Phonology of a Dead Language*. Monographien Zur Ägyptischen Sprache 2. Göttingen: Peust & Gutschmidt, 1999.

Carsten Peust's monograph may predate Allen's by over two decades but it is nevertheless a far deeper and more analytical discussion of phonology than can be claimed by Allen's work.

Bibliography on Morphology

Bibliography on Syntax

Words, Clitics, and Morphemes Discussed in the Text

Linguistic and Grammatical Topics

Texts Referenced as Examples