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Possessive Constructions in Egyptian and Coptic

Distribution, Definiteness, and the Construct State Phenomenon

1. Introduction

The distribution of Coptic possessive constructions can be defined purely in terms of syntactic constraints in which the definiteness of the possessed noun will have a decisive role. In relation to a comparison made between one of the Coptic possessive patterns and the so-called construct state phenomenon, a historical overview will also be presented to explore the possibility of a true construct state formation in earlier Egyptian language stages. This paper aims to point out that, from a typological point of view, a remarkable development can be observed: a formal and functional opposition that was about to disappear already in the first documented phases of the Egyptian language re-emerged in the distribution of the two Coptic possessive patterns.

The paper will be organized as follows: section 2 provides a brief introduction to the Sahidic Coptic noun phrase, with particular emphasis on possessive constructions. To make the argumentation clear, the determination system has to be shown as well. Following an overview of the previous theoretical assumptions, a purely syntactically-based rule will be formulated to account for the distribution of the two genitive constructions. Section 3 summarizes the properties of the so-called construct state phenomenon while section 4 investigates whether the term can be adapted to the direct genitive construction of Earlier Egyptian and its structural successors.

This paper is essentially a theoretical one about the typological nature of Egyptian possessive constructions rather than a corpus-based, exhaustive analysis of the data. However, it will hopefully contribute to the study of the Coptic noun phrase as well as the distributional properties of the genitive constructions. The core matter of this paper was presented during the Language Typology and Egyptian-Coptic Linguistics conference held in Leipzig, 2–5 October 2008[1].

2. The Coptic data (Sahidic dialect)

2.1. Determiners and possessive constructions

Normally, Coptic nouns are not marked morphologically for gender (masculine/feminine) and number (singular/plural); these categories become visible only by means of the agreeing determiners, or cross-reference performed by personal pronouns. There are, however, a few nouns that have two related forms corresponding to male and female biological sex, e. g. ⲥⲟⲛ ~ ⲥⲱⲛⲉ 'brother/sister' (for a list thereof, see Layton 2000: §107; Reintges 2004: 52–53), and a larger set of exceptional nouns exhibiting a remnant plural form, e.g. ⲥⲟⲛ ~ ⲥⲛⲏⲩ (Layton 2000: § 108(b); see also Vergote 1983: §§ 115–120). Determiners are the definite article (2), demonstrative article (3), possessive article (4), and indefinite article (5):

(1) **ρωμε**   **cωϣε**
     'man' (m.)   'field' (f.)

(2) **π-ρωμε**   **т-cωϣε**   **ν̄-ρωμε/cωϣε**
     'the man'   'the field'   'the men/fields'

(3) **πει-ρωμε**   **тει-cωϣε**   **νει-ρωμε/cωϣε**
     'this man'   'this field'   'these men/fields'

(4) **πεϥ-ρωμε**   **тεϥcωϣε**   **νεϥ-ρωμε/cωϣε**
     'his man'   'his field'   'his men/fields'

(5)   **оγ-ρωμε/cωϣε**   **ϩεν-ρωμε/cωϣε**
               'a man'   'men/fields'

The definite and the demonstrative articles show three distinct forms: in the singular they have a masculine as well as a feminine form, while in the plural no such morphological distinction can be found. The indefinite article has a singular and a plural variant only. Not only does the possessive article mark the number and gender of the possessed noun but also the person, the number and in certain cases (2. and 3. sg) the gender of the possessor. The determiners in (2)–(4) are all interpreted as definite, which can be attested by their occurrences in contexts that require definite expressions (e.g. the subject position of the so-called Bipartite Conjugation, or the antecedent position of a relative clause introduced by the converter **-ет/-ент**)[2].

Coptic has two types of possessive patterns. In both patterns, the order of the constituents is as follows: possessed noun phrase + a morpheme expressing the possessive/genitive relationship + possessor noun phrase. The obvious formal difference between the two constructions is in that one of them involves the element **ν̄-/(м̄-)** as a possessive marker, whereas in the other construction the preposition-like **ν̄те-/ν̄та**= is used.

Pattern A

(6)   **п-ϣηρε м̄-п-ноγте** [Luke 1:35]
       'God's son'

    [2] For the distribution of noun phrases according to definiteness consult *inter alia* S a t z i n g e r 1992: 74–75.

Pattern B

(7) **оγ-тηηβε ν̄те-п-ноγте** [Luke 11:20]
     'a finger of God'

(8) **πει-ϣηρε ν̄те-п-ρωμε** [John 12:34]
     'this son of the man'

(9) **п-ϣηρε ν̄-оγωт ν̄те-п-ноγте** [John 3:18]
     'the sole son of God'

In descriptive terms, the genitive relationship is expressed by Pattern A, except when the possessed noun is indefinite, has a demonstrative article, or is followed by an adjective or another modifier; in such cases Pattern B is used, as exemplified from (7) to (9). (Cf. Till 1961: § 113; Lambdin 1983: § 2.3. § 4.2. § 15.1. § 22.1; Vergote 1983: § 190.1. Steindorff, 1951: § 150: fails to mention the case of demonstratives and Ariel Shisha-Halevy (1986: 20, n. 30) is unconvinced of the relevance of this option.)

As for the nature of the morphemes marking the possessive relationship, I consider the **ν̄те-/ν̄та**= morphs to be prepositions, contrary to Layton's view (2000: § 204), who expresses his doubts arguing that ʿnte- never modifies a preceding verb or verbal clause. I am quite skeptical whether such a criterion is of any relevance in defining the category of preposition. Moreover, **ν̄те-** has a prepronominal allomorph as is usual with Coptic prepositions. In fact, it is this allomorph that introduces pronominal possessors in Pattern B:

(10) **оγ-ϣηρε ν̄та-ϥ**
      'a son of his'

On the other hand, I claim that the **ν̄-** element in Pattern A cannot be conceived as a

preposition. The latter has no prepronominal form. Pronominal possessors in constructions corresponding to our Pattern A are expressed by what is called the possessive article.

An even more striking characteristic is the formal similarity (if not even identity) of the possessive ⲛ̄- with the linking element in the attributive constructions. Certain Coptic grammars directly refer to both morphemes by the same rather neutral names such as "mark of relationship" (Layton 2000: § 203) or "nota relationis" (Shisha-Halevy 1986: 20). This problem, however, does not fall within the scope of the present article[3].

2.2. Distribution of the two possessive patterns

When observing the Coptic data, one can find a quasi complementary distribution between the two patterns introduced in the last section. As mentioned above, earlier grammars had pointed out the syntactic conditions of this distribution by listing the possible environments in which Pattern B appears rather than Pattern A. However, Bentley Layton explains the distribution on semantic grounds. In his terminology, possessive construction is a 'restrictive expansion', i.e. "a construction of two entity terms such that one restricts the meaning of the other by limiting the number of referents to which it applies" (Layton 2000: § 146). This restrictive expansion has two types: the construction of general (possessive) relationship and the construction of appurtenance. The construction of general (possessive) relationship expresses a general, logically ambiguous restrictive relationship ('related to, of') between nucleus and expansion element. The construction of appurtenance "expresses the subsumed natural relationship of part to whole, component to

system, offshoot to source, etc." and is more restrictive in meaning than general relationship (Layton 2000: §§ 146–148).

These semantically based definitions seem always problematic in some ways. The examples listed for illustration by Layton himself are, as far as I can judge, occasionally inconsequent. He presents the phrase "the parts of the body" (ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ-ⲡⲥⲱⲙⲁ) as a typical example for the appurtenance, but, at the same time, one can find "the bodies of the saints" or "the souls of people" among the examples for the general relationship. A similar pairing that shows the same problem would be "as servants of God" for the appurtenance, and "as apostles of Christ" for the general relationship. The semantic difference between the two phrases can hardly be captured in linguistic terms. Otherwise, his two types formally correspond to our Pattern A vs. Pattern B division, with the exception of ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ=. This morpheme is functionally split in his system: ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ= is used for the appurtenance as well as for the general relationship, if the possessor is pronominal and the possessed noun is not a simple definite entity term (cf. his table 11 on p. 114).

Shisha-Halevy 1986: 20–21 suggests that the original opposition was 'essential possession' vs. 'incidental possession' or 'appurtenance' but it usually neutralised and is maintained in isolated cases only, perhaps with a limited inventory of noun lexemes in the nucleus. As he himself notes (1986: 21, n. 32), this is the case in Bohairic, but the above statement does not account for the data in Sahidic.

In my view, the factors that determine the choice between the two patterns are purely syntactic: it depends on what kinds of modifiers are present. Pattern A is used in the case of simple definite possessed nouns, while Pattern B (the historically newer construction) is applied elsewhere, i.e. practically in all other cases, such as with indefinite or modified possessed nouns, and even with a possessed noun expanded by a demonstrative. Nonetheless, it's likely that semantics had its share in giving rise to the new pattern. To see the reconstruction of this development a short historical discourse shall be given.

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[3] My paper given at the Crossroads IV conference (Basel, 22th March 2009) focused on the origin and development of the grammatical opposition between attributive and possessive constructions. The written version of this paper is in preparation and will hopefully appear in Lingua Aegyptia.

Jan Borghouts investigates the origin of Coptic ⲚⲦⲈ- in his 1980 paper. There is a general consensus concerning its derivation from the preposition *mdj* 'with' (regularly attested from the 18th Dynasty onwards), but its genitival function before Demotic had been unnoticed until his contribution. Borghouts collects instances in Late Egyptian (found in colloquial texts only), in which this precursor partly shows a distribution similar to the Coptic preposition: it is used when the head noun is undetermined, or has an indefinite article, or is separated from the possessor phrase. (Note, however, that its use is optional, and *n*- is still far more frequent than *mdj* in these cases.) Borghouts further points out the fact that all of the examples express some sort of appurtenance rather than possession, which suggests that the original rise of Pattern B (the possessive construction mediated by ⲚⲦⲈ-) might as well have been motivated on semantic grounds, but the distribution of the new pattern seems to have been highly regularized by syntactic factors at a later stage and probably grammaticalized in this direction.

Leo Depuydt kindly provided me with the manuscript of his forthcoming article entitled "The double genitive particle in Latest Late Egyptian, Demotic and Coptic", in which he offers a very attractive alternative approach in favour of a purely syntactic analysis. In his train of thought, the entire process began with the emergence of the possessive article in Late Egyptian. As a consequence, a new strategy was needed to express a pronominal possessor with indefinite nouns and with nouns modified by demonstratives. These constructions, while fully compatible with the earlier possessive suffix pronoun, are incompatible with the new possessive article. One of the new strategies for solving this problem was the pronominal possessor introduced by *mdj/mtw* that later spread over the patterns with nominal possessor as well, producing, in the end, a completely split system in terms of the highly regularized distribution of possessive Pattern A and B in Coptic.

When studying the examples against a syntactically based distribution of Shisha-Halevy (1986: 21), the following observations can be made. The majority of the apparent counterex-

amples fall under the Definite Possessee ⲚⲦⲈ-Possessor Pattern, indicating nothing more than the fact that the distribution is not complementary. Put differently, the relationship between the two patterns is not symmetrical. The possessed noun in Pattern A is obligatorily definite and not compatible with any other determiner or modifier; should the presence of such modifiers be needed, Pattern B resolves the situation. However, in Pattern B, simple determination is not excluded either. The Definite Possessee ⲚⲦⲈ- Indefinite Possessor Pattern does not serve as a counterexample either, considering that in the distributional rule no constraints have been formulated with respect to the possessor's determination. The examples of the Indefinite Possessee Ⲛ̄- Possessor Pattern all turn out to contain a lexicalised expression as the second constituent, such as Ⲛ̄-ⲦⲈⲒ-ϨⲈ/Ⲛ̄-ⲦⲈⲒ-ⲘⲒⲚⲈ 'such, of this sort'. The one case that could present a problem in our analysis would be the Bare Noun Possessee Ⲛ̄- Possessor Pattern. That the noun phrase remains undetermined might be due to the predicative use of this type[4]. This explanation is reinforced by the oscillation that can be observed between the two linking elements, Ⲛ̄- and ⲚⲦⲈ-, in these patterns.

As unusual as the distribution of Coptic possessive constructions may seem, many parallels can be detected in other languages, such as the English preposed/postposed genitive alternation. The preposed possessive construction (e.g. 'John's book', 'a professor's work') is usually understood as definite. Lyons 1986: 138–140 explains this phenomenon by the fact that the genitive phrase occupies the same position that is otherwise filled by the definite article, which forces a definite interpretation. In the case of an indefinite head noun, or if the head noun is modified by a demonstrative, another construction must be used, typically a prepositional complement (e.g. 'a friend of mine', 'this friend of mine')[5]. Though Coptic has no preposed con-

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[4] Cf. Helmut Satzinger's reflections (1992: 77) on the syntactic environments where definiteness is *neutralized*.

[5] Lyons introduced a new distinction: languages of the above type are determiner-genitive languages,

structions (except for the one with a pronominal possessor), Pattern A implies the same simple definite interpretation of the noun phrase. In English possessives, strict adjacency is not required (e.g. 'the professor's *scientific* books'), which, however, is an essential requirement in Coptic. Pattern A demands obligatory (and simple) definiteness of the possessed noun and strict adjacency between the possessee and the possessor. On the other hand, this type of relationship is reminiscent of the criteria established for the so-called 'construct state formation' in certain languages.

Last but not least, before moving on the construct state phenomena, a further syntactically-based approach is to be mentioned that seeks to explain the distribution of the two patterns. In his recent grammar-book, R e i n t g e s 2004: 94 claims that "the linkage marker ⲛ- is selected, when the possessed noun and the possessor agree in in/definiteness and consequently display the same type of determiner. (…) If there is a mismatch in definiteness, however, the competing marker ⲛⲧⲉ must be chosen instead". This definition is easily falsified by such common examples as the one in (11):

(11)   ⲡ-ⲣⲁⲛ ⲛ-ⲟⲩ-ⲡⲣⲟⲫⲏⲧⲏⲥ [Matt 10:41]
        'The name of a prophet'

As I have previously indicated, the choice between the linkers is absolutely indifferent to the form of the *possessor*: the second member of the construction can be indefinite, or modified in both patterns. With respect to the pronominal allomorph ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ=, Reintges claims that it "appears in a single context only, namely when an indefinite possessed noun is construed with a pronominal possessor". This case was exemplified in (10) in the present paper. However, demonstrative and possessive articles compete for the same structural position. Given that the possessive article can express simple definiteness only, Pattern B must be applied when the pos-

sessed noun has a demonstrative article (12). Otherwise, an alternative, periphrastic structure may be used (13).

(12)   ⲧⲉⲓ-ⲉⲝⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ-ⲧⲏⲩⲧⲛ̄ [1 Cor 8:9]
        'This liberty of yours'

(13)   ⲛⲁ-ϣⲁϫⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲛⲉ [Matt 7:24]
        'These words of mine'

3. Obligatory definiteness and the *status constructus* phenomenon

The term *status constructus* or construct state was originally introduced in Semitic linguistics. Practically, the term refers to the special state (i.e. form) of the first member in a possessive construction as opposed to the absolute state or absolute use of the same noun[6]. The possessive construction is realized by the juxtaposition of two or more nouns in a sequence on the hand, and by the altered state of the possessed noun on the other. The juxtaposition does not necessarily cause the morphophonological alteration of the possessee, which is, however, the case in Hebrew: the two parts of construct chain become closely linked with respect to the accentuation as well. The main stress shifts to the *nomen rectum*, and the *nomen regens* becomes proclitic. As a consequence of this deaccentuation (the loss of stress), the *rectum* often undergoes other morphophonological changes, especially vowel shortening or vowel reduction (M c C a r t e r 2004, 338). A similar construction can be found in classical Arabic, though the possessed noun is not subject to such a radical change in form. The rule of strict adjacency holds true, in a way that a modifier, referring to either of the nouns, must follow the whole construction. (Cf. W r i g h t 1951³: 198−234) In both languages, as a general

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whereas languages such as Italian, where genitives can co-occur with the definite as well as with the indefinite article ("il mio libro", "un mio libro") are adjectival-genitive languages. For further details, consult L y o n s 1986 and 1999, esp. Chapter 8.

[6]   There are synthetic and analytic types of possessive constructions according to the degree of morpho-syntactic bondedness of the construction markers. Within the synthetic type there are more techniques: head-marking, dependent-marking or double-marking (with the construct state constructions evidently falling within the first group). For this typological classification and further structural types of possessive noun phrase, see K o p t j e v s k a j a - T a m m 2001, 961−963.

rule, the first member (the possesed noun in the construct state) cannot have a definite article or any determiner, yet is interpreted as definite. Such a relationship between definiteness and possessedness can be observed in modern Celtic languages as well. Celtic possessive constructions are not considered to be *constructus* phenomena since the *nomen regens* has no special form or state; the strict adjacency of the possessed noun and the possesser is not required either. Nevertheless, the possessed noun cannot have any determiner, and, at the same time, is understood as definite, regardless of the (in)definiteness of the possessor. (For Irish data, see Ó Dochartaigh 1992: 54. For Welsh: Thomas 1992: 296 and 305.) Despite their considerable diversity, the languages having been listed so far (including Coptic), share one important feature: the presence of the possessive expression implies the obligatory definiteness of the head noun, the *nomen regens*.

It has been demonstrated in several languages that the article and the possessive expression mutually exclude each other. This incompatibility may have a functional explanation: prototypical adnominal possessors and articles have something in common. Possessors are able to serve as an anchoring device, a reference point for the head noun. In other words, the referent of a noun can be identified via its relation to the referent of its possessor (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001: 964. with further references). The marking of definiteness in the presence of a possessor expression is to some extent redundant, therefore, in certain languages, the economic motivation may result in the complementarity of article and possessor, as it is claimed by Martin Haspelmath in a language typological article (Haspelmath 1999). In Coptic, the definite article on the head noun and the possessive expression are not incompatible, but it is only the article encoding simple definiteness that can appear with the nomen regens in Pattern A, so the above-established correlation is present in a certain way[7].

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[7] For a proposal on how to formalize the derivation of Coptic possessive constructions in a generative framework, see Egedi 2005.

4. *Status constructus* phenomenon in Egyptian

4.1. The direct and indirect genitive constructions of Earlier Egyptian – distribution and productivity

The term 'construct state' has never been associated with the Coptic Pattern A, but is often used for compounds such as ⲟ̄ⲟⲩⲙⲓⲥⲉ 'birthday' and for its presumed predecessor, the direct genitive construction of Earlier Egyptian. Thus, it may be instructive to consider the question from a diachronic perspective. The next section aims to explore the possibility of construct state type possessive constructions in the language stages preceding Coptic and to track their development through the history of language.

In the earliest documented stages, in Old and Middle Egyptian, there were two types of possessive constructions. In both of them, the order of the elements is possessee + possessor, likewise. In the direct genitive construction, the possessor follows the possessed noun directly, without linking element. The term 'construct state' is generally used for this pattern by Egyptologists. In the indirect genitive construction, the two members are connected by a so-called 'genitival adjective' that agrees with the head noun in number and gender (Gardiner 1973: 65–66, § 85–86; Callendar 1975: 66. § 4.2.7). Pronominal possessors are expressed by possessive suffix pronouns.

Unfortunately, the distribution of the two patterns is far from being understood. According to Gardiner 1957: 65, direct genitive construction was usual "wherever the connexion between governing and governed noun is particularly close, as in titles, set phrases, etc." In these cases, an attribute modifying the possessed noun normally follows the whole construction:

(14) *jmj-r pr wr* [Peas. B 1,47]
　　　'great overseer of the house'

If an element interrupts the sequence of the head noun and the related possessor expression, the indirect construction must be used (Gardiner 1957: 66). This may be observed in (15), where the 2SG suffix pronoun intervenes, and,

instead of the direct genitive that requires strict adjacency, the less restricted pattern, the indirect genitive, is used.

(15)   *jmjw-r=**k** nw rwy.t* [Ptahhotep 442. L1]
        'your overseers of the portal'

Nevertheless, the productivity of the construct state-like direct genitive pattern is highly questionable – as also hinted at in Gardiner's above-cited definition. S c h e n k e l 1991: 122 believes the pattern is partially productive, and so does S h i s h a - H a l e v y 2007a: 239. The latter considers unmediated nominal expansion as mainly compounding, which "are often, but certainly not always, terminological, phraseological or idiomatic". C a l l e n d a r 1975: 66; § 4.2.7 suggests that in Middle Egyptian the direct genitive is no longer productive and "seems best to be considered as compounding rather than a genuine genitive construction". L o p r i e n o 1995: 57 claims that direct genitive was still a productive device in classical Egyptian, admitting that it was "not as frequent as in Akkadian, Hebrew or Arabic, and tended to be replaced by the analytic construction with the determinative pronoun *n(j)*" (with this latter corresponding to the genitival adjective)[8].

It should be noted, however, that the trial for productivity is not necessarily frequency. It would be definitely more adequate to define the motivation of the distribution between the two patterns. If a general rule were formulated, the direct genitive construction could be assumed as productive. It seems reasonable to go back to the earliest occurrences of such constructions so as to see whether productivity can be justified. E d e l 1955–64: §§ 318–319, unconvinced of the existence of such a general rule, summarizes and evaluates the previous endeavors as to formulate one with respect to the distribution between direct and indirect genitive constructions in Old Egyptian: Sander-Hansen's (1936) statistic investigation into the corpus of Pyramid Texts resulted in a kind of accent-rule: direct genitive construction is preferred when the last

syllable of the *nomen regens* in unaccented. According to J u n k e r 1938: 94, the direct genitive must be used when the *regens* owns the *rectum* as in *nb pr* 'the lord of the house', i.e. 'the lord who owns the house', otherwise a free variation is observed. Edel, however, presents several counterexamples against both analyses. Interestingly enough, Edel notes (§ 324) that direct genitive is preferred with body parts in plural and dual. (In spell 539 of the PT, direct genitive occurs ten times with duals/plurals, and indirect genitive is used ten times with body-part nouns in singular). This observation is remarkable in that it defies Shisha-Halevy's claim (2007a: 239), according to which "plurality practically selects the mediated construction, and reduces inalienability".

In his outstanding paper (2000), Jansen-Winkeln critically analyzes the previous theoretical approaches – including the above-mentioned ones – concerning the distribution and difference in meaning between the two genitives. He points out that the most acceptable contribution to this question is that of Schenkel's (1962) who argues that the unity of the rectum and regens is faster in the direct genitive than in the indirect one, and this fastness is basically influenced by the lexical meaning of the head noun. (J a n s e n - W i n k e l n 2000: 31) Syntactically speaking, only those cases can be listed in which the direct genitive *should not be used*, and the indirect genitive is obligatory; otherwise they seem to be free variants[9]. The only restric-

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[8]   I have previously argued against this morpheme's being a determinative pronoun. (E g e d i 2005: 143)

[9]   B a k i r 1966: 36, in making a comparison between Egyptian and Arabic, claims that the head noun of an indirect construction must always be regarded undefined. In reality, indirect genitives were used for indefinite possessees because these are excluded from construct state-like direct genitive constructions. This does not mean, however, that the possessee of an indirect construction could not be definite at all. K a m m e r z e l l 2000: 102 suggests an opposition, according to which head marking possessives were used for expressing the inalienable possession, whereas dependent marking (*nj-*marked) for the alienable one. While alienability split will play a major role in Later Egyptian, it can be hardly evidenced in Middle Egyptian. There are several instances of direct genitive constructions where the relation of the two members is far from being inalienable and *vice versa*.

tion that can be stipulated is that the lexeme-type (e.g. nouns denoting body parts) and the form (e.g. monosyllabic masculine nouns) may influence the choice between the two constructions.

Jansen-Winkeln 2000: 29 has come to the conclusion that in Old and Middle Egyptian the direct genitive was not a mere compound but a free operation of combining words, admitting that in several individual cases the given construction had become lexicalized as a compound noun. In support of his proposal, it's worth noting that (partial) productivity in the earliest documented language stages does not exclude the possibility that direct genitive construction was no longer a true *syntactic* process. It might also be supposed that direct genitive was a morphological process of creating compound nouns; in other words, a productive pattern of lexical compounding. Morphological operations of this sort can be productive and, at the same time, optional (cf. "the handle of the door" vs. "the door-handle").

4.2. Formal properties and historical development of the direct genitive construction

4.2.1. Definiteness

The next issue to be discussed is whether the Egyptian direct genitive construction could be equated with the construct state pattern in a formal sense. As obvious as the strict adjacency is, the obligatory definiteness is hardly observable considering that there is no article in Earlier Egyptian, thus neither its obligatory appearance nor its systematic absence can be tested. What might be established with a relative certainty is that the suffix pronouns in possessive function do not imply obligatory definiteness: a noun with a pronominal possessor can appear in syntactic environments that are typically designed for indefinite descriptions such as the existential sentence. To be considered here, is the well-known example from the very beginning of the Eloquent Peasant: *jst wn ḥmt=f* 'he had a wife' [R2]. In fact, there are no alternative constructions in Middle Egyptian to express notions like 'a friend of his'[10]. Similar occurrences of nominal possessors can never be decisive because the combination of two nouns (originally in a direct genitive construction), once having become lexicalized as a compound, constitutes a single word in the lexicon, and, as such, it behaves as an individual lexeme rather than a construction. Accordingly, it can be either definite or indefinite – as the context requires it.

In Late Egyptian, with the rise of the article-system, the possibility of testing definiteness also emerges, but, by that time, the analytic indirect pattern will have become the only productive operation. The genitival adjective ceased to agree with the possessed noun in number and gender, i.e. grammaticalized in one form. The basic pattern of Late Egyptian possessive construction is *p3* A *n p3* B, where *p3* stands for the whole article class. However, there are certain patterns evidenced in Late Egyptian that may have something to do with the construct state, or else, show the signs of an earlier construct state structure.

1.) Pattern *p3* A B: a definite article precedes the whole construction.

These cases, however, appear to be real compounds.

(16) *p3 wḥꜥ ꜣpd* [LRL 20,8. Černý – Groll 1978: 75. Ex 232.]
      'the fowler' (the catcher of bird)

This type is very similar to the later Coptic compounds, such as �ϩⲟⲩⲙⲓⲥⲉ 'birthday', whose morphological make-up shows the original construct state formation (with ϩⲟⲩ- corresponding to the absolute use of the word ϩⲟⲟⲩ 'day'). These compounds are obviously lexicalized, and constitute new words in the lexicon[11]. A single article may be attached to these lexemes, whose definiteness depends on the syntactic context rather than on the internal structure of the word. (For similar lexicalized compounds, see exam-

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[10] Malaise-Winand 1999: 76 and 333 also points out that the suffixed type is not necessarily definite.

[11] On occasion, the first member in such compounds survives only as a nominal prefix, e.g. *mdt* > ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧ-.

ples in: Till 1961: § 120, §§ 123–24, § 130, §§ 133–140; Vergote 1973: § 87, § 101, § 103; Also see Layton 2000: § 109, § 112 and Reintges 2004: § 3.1.2) Of course, the exact time when the lexicalization of the individual cases took place is unknown.

2.) The pattern A *p3* B: most resembles the construct state formation, as both the linking element and the definite article of the head noun are lacking.

(17)　*ʿ.wy p3 ntr* [LRL 1,8. Černý – Groll 1978: 75. Ex 229.]
　　　'God's hands'

In these constructions, however, only a well-defined, closed set of nouns occurs, practically being the same nouns that still co-occur with pronominal suffixes, contrary to the standard Late Egyptian use of possessive articles. These nouns are listed in Late Egyptian grammars as 'nouns that cannot take an article'. In Junge's Late Egyptian grammar, these are described as designations for inalienable objects ("Bezeichnungen unveräußerlicher Gegenstände"), such as body parts, terms related to persons (name, condition), kinship terms, certain topographic designations, etc. (Junge 1996: § 2.1.3(2)) A shrinking subset of these nouns behaves likewise in Demotic and Coptic (Simpson 1996, 81–82; Till 1961: § 188; Layton 2000: § 138.).

While these nouns are said to be unable to take an article, they are probably better to be described as lexically marked for forming *status constructus* (or *pronominalis*) with their possessor (surviving as relics), instead of undergoing the productive analytic operation. If the Egyptian construct state was indeed similar to the Semitic and Celtic patterns, insofar as the possessed noun's having become definite as a consequence of taking part in such a construction, then the absence of an article may be accounted for in a natural way. The only reason why the nouns themselves (rather than the whole construction) seem not to tolerate the articles is that they are hardly (or never) found independently. In semantic terms, these nouns are relational nouns, i.e. they usually require an additional argument, a possessor, to be related to. It is this semantic

and consequently syntactic boundness that might be responsible for their apparent irregularity.

Similarly, Leo Depuydt pointed out (1999: 281–282) that, in the transition from Middle to Late Egyptian, the shift to the analytic genitive constructions was resisted by some nouns denoting body parts and a few other inalienables such as *rn* 'name'. In his explanation, this resistance may be owing to fact that nouns denoting body parts are frequently used, and, at the same time, they are often used with suffix pronouns[12].

Examples comparable to (17) can be found in Demotic as well: in (18) only the second member displays an article, but the first member (actually the whole noun phrase) is also interpreted as definite. The noun in this type of pattern is again a noun denoting a body part.

(18)　*ʿ p3 ntr* ['Onchsheshonqy 11:23; Johnson 1987: 44, E6a]
　　　'the hand of God'

Simpson 1996: 80 pointed out, by means of convincing syntactic tests, that these nouns, although incompatible with determiners indeed, do occur in positions where zero determination is ungrammatical, e.g. in durative subject position. In my opinion, this phenomenon is only possible because these noun phrases occupy their syntactic positions in their construct state forms, and are, therefore, definite by nature.

It has been already alluded to that the exceptional behavior of nouns denoting inalienable objects may be due to the fact that they are usually relational nouns. The Egyptian language does not present an isolated case in this respect. From a typological point of view, it is not an

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[12] Depuydt examined the strange "split" genitives of Demotic and Coptic where synthetic and analytic designs co-occur, and explained the data by the conflicting forces of the analytic shift and the resistance by the surviving synthetic forms to analysis. As a result, when construct state formation definitively disappeared as a productive mechanism, the absolute forms of this range of resistant nouns were no longer available, which gave rise to the emergence of these strange split genitive types. I am in full agreement with his line of reasoning as well as with his proposal that the ⲛ- in Coptic compounds such as ⲡⲘ̄Ⲛ̄ⲔⲎⲘⲈ 'Egyptian' might have the same origin.

uncommon phenomenon that, in the case of more than one possessive constructions in a language, the grammatical split corresponds to the alienable vs. inalienable semantic opposition. In Maltese, for example, the construct state is used only with inalienable nouns; the possessor is introduced by a prepositional expression elsewhere[13]. In the Bohairic dialect, alienability also seems to play an important role with respect to the distribution between {ⲡ-}…ⲛ-… and {ⲡⲓ-}…ⲛⲧⲉ-… patterns (Shisha-Halevy 1991: 56; also see Depuydt 1985: 61).

3.) The pattern A *n pꜣ* B is discussed by Depuydt 1999: 294–295 as a hybrid formation: the appearance of a linking element (*n-*) is an analytic feature, while the (obligatory) omission of the first noun's article is the survival of a synthetic form. Depuydt himself is doubtful of the existence of the preceding A *pꜣ* B type (with no linking *n-*) because of the frequent omission of *n* graphemes in Demotic writing (1999: 292), which causes a great deal of difficulty in certain parts of Demotic grammatical investigations indeed.

4.2.2. Morphological properties

For obvious reasons, there is little to elaborate on the morphological properties of a possible construct state in the pre-Coptic stages. As noted by Gardiner, it is shown in Coptic that the direct genitival relation in Middle Egyptian led to the loss of accent and vowel reduction in the first of the two members, which, on the other hand, left no trace in hieroglyphic writing (Gardiner 1957: § 85 Obs).

(19)   ⲉⲓⲱϩⲉ 'field' ~ ⲉⲓⲉϩ-ⲉⲗⲟⲟⲗⲉ 'vineyard' (< field of vines)

A reference to Coptic, while speaking about Middle Egyptian in fact, might seem methodologically problematic as it obviously skips two thousand years in the history of language. As evidence from Coptic is always taken for grant-

ed, the majority of grammars do presume the morphological change of the possessed noun in earlier language phases as well (Cf. e.g. Schenkel 1990: 81; and his systematic presentation of the three states in Middle Egyptian: Schenkel 1991: 105, § 5.1.1.3). This presumption, however, cannot be supported directly since such morphophonological a change is never indicated in (the consonantal) writing. Yet, there is a sort of indirect evidence. There is a phenomenon that is sporadically reflected in Middle Egyptian orthography as well: when the pronominal suffix is attached to certain feminine nouns, "an apparently intrusive -*w* occasionally appears before the feminine ending -*t*", probably due to a displacement of accent, or more precisely, the original -*w* is retained under the protection of the accent in *status pronominalis* (Gardiner 1957: § 78).

(20)   a.   *dpt* [Peas. B 1,157]
            'boat'
       b.   *dpwt=f* [Peas. B 2,103]
            'his boat'

Similarly, there is a class of irregular Coptic nouns that still take the old suffix as a pronominal possessor instead of the possessive article. When expanded by this pronominal suffix, these nouns take a special form, the so-called *status pronominalis* whose vocalisation differs from the absolute form of the word (e.g. ϩⲏⲧ, ϩⲧⲏ= 'heart'). If the addition of a possessive suffix did give rise to a morphophonological change of the head noun, it is likely that the direct juxtaposition of a nominal possessor had a similar and systematic effect on the form of the possessed noun, resulting in a status nominalis already in use in the earliest language phases. The traces of the latter are also evidenced in the ϩⲟⲩⲙⲓⲥⲉ type compounds.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion of the above investigation, it seems tenable that a construction of the so-called construct state type did exist in the Egyptian language. This is justified by syntactic factors such as the survival of the Late Egyptian

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[13] For Maltese examples and for the alienability split in general, see: Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001: 965.

and Demotic *A pȝ B* pattern and by morphological traces in Coptic lexicalized compounds. The productivity of this construct state-like direct genitive is questionable as early as in Old and Middle Egyptian, and this type of construction was gradually replaced by the analytic pattern of the indirect genitive.

In a formal sense, The Coptic pattern A is the successor to this analytic type, but functionally has reduced to certain syntactic environments: the possessed noun must be definite and strictly adjacent to its possessor – a distribution which is strikingly similar to the supposed distribution of the earlier direct genitive construction. To express the other types of possessive constructions (with indefinite possessee, etc.) an alternative structure emerged with the prepositional phrase (ⲚⲦⲈ-/ⲚⲦⲀ-).

From a typological point of view, it is remarkable that, in a language which had been documented through millennia, a linguistic phenomenon, a formal and functional opposition first neutralized, quasi disappeared, and later functionally re-emerged in the distribution of the two Coptic possessive patterns. Additionally, traces can be found that, in a certain variety of the language (in the Bohairic dialect), the equivalent of Pattern A began to decline again, or, at least, became far more restricted in its usage, bringing about an alienability split within the possessive system[14] along the same lines with the earlier stages.

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[14] When studying Ariel Shisha Halevy's enormous work (2007b, esp. 430–447) on this matter, it became obvious that Bohairic shows a complicated distribution of possessive patterns in a strict correlation with a multiple determination system. While the author of the present paper does not yet feel competent enough to judge the data used therein, hopes to integrate them in her future researches.

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Summary

In this paper, the distribution of Coptic possessive constructions is defined in terms of syntactic constraints: the construction involving the linking element N̄- requires the obligatory (and simple) definiteness of the possessed noun as well as the strict adjacency of *regens* and *rectum*. In relation to a comparison made between this Coptic possessive pattern and the so-called construct state phenomenon, a historical overview of the Egyptian language is given to explore the possible reconstruction of a true construct state formation in the earlier language stages.

Keywords

Coptic language – genitive – Possessive (constructions) – status constructus