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Attribution vs. Possession in Coptic*

The Origin and Development of an Opposition

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Abstract

This paper is intended to reconstruct the process that led to the formal opposition between the patterns used for expressing possessive and attributive relationships in the Coptic language (Sahidic dialect). Having explained this opposition on a synchronic level, the following questions should be answered: What is the source of the formal likeness; How did this system develop, and what were the syntactic and semantic preconditions for such a grammaticalization? Having identified the common source, an additional question arises: How come the two constructions still differ, and do not show a complete formal identity?

1 The possessive and attributive constructions in Coptic

1.1 Possessive patterns: pattern A and B

The distribution of Coptic possessive patterns has already been discussed in two other papers of mine (Egedi 2005 & *forthcoming*), with the data and main claims covered herein being repeated with the sole purpose of further clarification. In the two types of Coptic possessive patterns, the order of the constituents is as follows: possessed noun phrase + a morpheme expressing genitive/possessive relationship + possessor noun phrase. The formal difference between the two constructions lies in that one of them involves the element $\bar{\text{N}}/(\bar{\text{M}})$ as a possessive marker, whereas the preposition-like $\bar{\text{N}}\text{T}\bar{\text{E}}/(\bar{\text{N}}\text{T}\bar{\text{A}})$ is used in the other construction. As demonstrated by examples (1) to (4), the possessive relationship is expressed by *pattern A* unless the possessed noun is either indefinite, has a demonstrative article, or is followed by an adjective or another modifier, in which cases *pattern B* is used instead.¹

Pattern A

(1) $\text{N}-\text{QHP}\bar{\text{E}}$ $\bar{\text{N}}-\text{N}-\text{NOY}\bar{\text{T}}\bar{\text{E}}$ [Luke 1:35]
 DEF.SG.M-son POSS-DEF.SG.M-god
 ‘God’s son’

Pattern B

(2) $\text{OY}-\text{THH}\bar{\text{E}}$ $\bar{\text{N}}\text{T}\bar{\text{E}}-\text{N}-\text{NOY}\bar{\text{T}}\bar{\text{E}}$ [Luke 11:20]

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¹ Till (1961: §113); Vergote (1983: §190.1); Steindorff (1951: §150) with no mention of the case of demonstratives. Shisha-Halevy (1986: 20, n.30) is unconvinced of the relevance of this option

- INDF.SG-finger POSS-DEF.SG.M-god
 ‘a finger of God’
- (3) **ΠΕΙ-ΩΗΡΕ** **Ν̄ΤΕ-Π-ΡΩΜΕ** [John 12:34]
 DEM.SG.M-son POSS-DEF.SG.M-man
 ‘this son of the man’
- (4) **Π-ΩΗΡΕ** **Ν̄-ΟΥΩΤ** **Ν̄ΤΕ-Π-ΝΟΥΤΕ** [John 3:18]
 DEF.SG.M-son ADJ.PRT-sole POSS-DEF.SG.M-god
 ‘the sole son of God’

As for the nature of the morphemes marking the possessive relationship, I consider the $\bar{\nu}\tau\epsilon$ -/ $\bar{\nu}\tau\alpha$ = morphs to be prepositions, contrary to Layton’s view (2000: §204), and claim that, on the other hand, the $\bar{\nu}$ - element in *pattern A* cannot be conceived as a preposition (against Lambdin 1983: 6). This latter has no prenominal form, though Coptic prepositions usually have one. Pronominal possessors in constructions corresponding to our *pattern A* are expressed by what is called the possessive article.²

There is a striking formal similarity (if not even identity) of the possessive $\bar{\nu}$ - to the linking element in the attributive constructions (see below). 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). The formal affinity of the two morphemes is, of course, not incidental, and can be explained by their common source (see section 3 below). The two constructions, in which the so called *nota relationis* occur in Coptic are, however, structurally and functionally different, and as such their linking elements, despite their apparent identity in form, should be treated as distinct morphs.

Contrary to some previous explanations (Layton 2000: §§146-148; Shisha-Halevy 1986: 21; Reintges 2004: 94) I have argued for a purely syntactic formulation of the distribution between the two possessive patterns: *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. In other words, *Pattern A* requires obligatory (and simple) definiteness of the possessed noun as well as the strict adjacency between the possessee and the possessor. However, the distribution of *Pattern A* and *B* is not complementary: Although *Pattern B* seems to be used in all the syntactic environments from which *Pattern A* is excluded, *Pattern B* may be found as well with simple determination of the possessed noun, which suggests an asymmetrical relationship between the two patterns.

1.2 Attributive construction

Adjectives in Coptic are not adjoined to the head-noun directly, but by means of the linking element $\bar{\nu}$ -. To be exact, (without determining the relative order within the

² I am opposed to Antonio Loprieno’s view (1995: 56) according to which the linking element $\bar{\nu}$ - must be a determinative pronoun similar to the one used in Hebrew attributive constructions. The Hebrew phenomenon can be explained as an agreement in definiteness within the noun phrase. In Coptic, however, the appearance of the modifier marker $\bar{\nu}$ - is independent of the definiteness of the head-noun.

noun phrase), the two (or more) elements of an attributive construction are mediated by this linking morpheme, as illustrated by the below examples (5)-(8):³

- (5) **ⲡⲠⲙⲉ ⲛ̄-ⲃⲓⲱⲧⲓⲕⲟⲥ** [Hil 13:25] (6) **ⲠⲮ-ⲡⲠⲙⲉ ⲛ̄-Ⲙⲁⲃⲉ** [Matt 7,24]
man ADJ.PRT-this-wordly INDF.SG-man ADJ.PRT-wise
 ‘man of this world’ ‘a wise man’
- (7) **ⲒⲈⲚ-Ⲡⲁⲭⲉ ⲛ̄-ⲃⲣⲣⲉ** [Hil 1:18] (8) **ⲡ-ⲠⲮⲠⲟⲩⲉⲓⲛ ⲛ̄-ⲙⲉ** [John 1:9]
INDF.PL-word ADJ.PRT-new DEF.SG.M-light ADJ.PRT-true
 ‘new words’ ‘the true light’

Two difficulties have to be faced when analyzing the attributive constructions: The “adjectival” category defined for Coptic proves to be problematic, considering the fact that the modifier part of the construction can be filled not only by prototypical property describing lexemes (like *beautiful*, *great*, etc.) but practically by any nominal element as well. The other apparently confusing fact is, as mentioned above, that the linking morpheme that signals the attributive relationship seems to be the very same as the one in the possessive *Pattern A*. The semantic difference, however, is obvious between the attribution/qualification on the one hand and the possession on the other, thus, there must be one or more rules for disambiguation on the formal side of these linguistic expressions, too, in order to be able to clearly distinguish between *Pattern A* and the attributive pattern, if necessary.

As observed by many scholars the second element of the attributive construction, the modifier introduced by \bar{n} -, cannot have any determiner (Shisha-Halevy 1988: 6-8; Reintges 2004: 90); moreover, it is this zero-determination that contributes to the attributive reading of this type of adnominal modification. (Shisha-Halevy 1986: 131 §4.1). Another crucial syntactic difference lies in that this *Noun* + \bar{n} - + *Noun* sequence can further have any sort of determiner (definite, indefinite, demonstrative, or even a possessive article), which shows that attributive expansion does not affect the degree of definiteness of the whole phrase in the way it is conditioned in possessive *Pattern A*. Therefore, the generalized formula of the attributive construction in Coptic might be: (Det) N \bar{n} - N.

To illustrate the differences between possession vs. attribution appearing *on the syntactic level*, three examples will be cited with the same lexical content, from the very same text (The Life of Apa Onnophrios, after Till 1961: 282):

- (9) **ⲡ-Ⲓⲱⲃ ⲛ̄-ⲛⲉⲕ-ⲟⲓⲭ**
DEF.SG.M-thing POSS- POSSART.PL.:your-hand
 ‘the work of your hands’
- (10) **ⲒⲈⲚ-Ⲓⲱⲃ ⲛ̄-ⲟⲓⲭ** (11) **ⲡⲁ-Ⲓⲱⲃ ⲛ̄-ⲟⲓⲭ**
INDF.PL-thing ADJ.PRT-hand POSSART.SG:my-thing ADJ.PRT-hand
 ‘handiworks’ ‘my handiwork’

While the first phrase is a possessive, the second and the third ones are attributive constructions. In (9), the possessor by itself constitutes a full noun phrase with a possessive article of its own (**ⲛⲉⲕ-** ‘your’), and the possessed noun (actually the head

³ For further description of this construction and relevant examples, see Layton 2000 (or 2004²): §§96-103; Reintges 2004: 90 §3.1.3; Steindorff 1951: §§147-150; Stern 1880: §§185-188; Till 1961: 67-68 §114; Vergote 1983: §189.

of the construction) is simply definite. In (10) and (11), it is only a bare noun that follows the linking element \bar{n} .⁴ The \bar{n} -marked complex (\bar{n} - $\sigma\iota\chi$) literally corresponds to ‘of hand’ with the intended meaning so as to assign the quality ‘made by hand’ to the head-noun. Since the whole expression ($\zeta\omega\beta$ \bar{n} - $\sigma\iota\chi$ ‘handiwork’) neither describes a possessive relationship, nor is referential by itself, it can be either indefinite (as in 10) or can also have an external possessor manifested here by the possessive article ($\pi\alpha$ - ‘my’) in (11). If the linking element \bar{n} - in (11) were a real possessive marker, the construction as a whole would result in nonsense. Put differently, the presence of the possessive article precludes the genitive interpretation of the linking particle.

A third construction that shares some formal (and partially semantic properties) with the possessive patterns is the partitive construction. It expresses a relationship in which one or more items belong to a group, a “contextually specified partitioned set, from which a proper subset is taken”, as Chris Reintges (2004: 105) describes it in relation to the semantic function of the preposition n -/ $m\mu\sigma$ -. Consequently, the first element is usually an indefinite expression (even if specific), while the second one is a full noun phrase. The linking element is a real preposition with two interrelated forms, in *status nominalis* and *pronominalis*.

- (12) a. $\sigma\upsilon\alpha$ \bar{n} - $n\epsilon\eta\eta$ - $\epsilon\iota\omicron\tau\epsilon$ b. $\sigma\upsilon\alpha$ $\bar{m}\mu\sigma$ - $\omicron\upsilon$
 one PART-POSSART.PL:our-fathers one PART-3PL
 ‘one of our fathers’ ‘one of them’
- (13) a. π - $n\omicron\beta\epsilon$ \bar{n} - $n\epsilon\eta\eta$ - $\epsilon\iota\omicron\tau\epsilon$
 DEF.SG.M-sin POSS-POSSART.PL:our-fathers
 ‘our father’s sin’
- b. * π - $n\omicron\beta\epsilon$ $\bar{m}\mu\sigma$ - $\omicron\upsilon$ c. $\pi\epsilon\upsilon$ - $n\omicron\beta\epsilon$
 DEF.SG.M-sin PART-3PL POSSART.SG:their-sin
 *‘the sin of them’ ‘their sin’

The confusion generated by the formal identity of all these linking elements becomes evident also in such brilliant works as that of Bentley Layton’s grammar. Having accurately examined the data presented by Layton for partitive relationship (2000: §203), a few of his examples might rather be analyzed as attributive constructions, instead.

2 Is there an ‘adjective’ category in Coptic?

The formula for attributive constructions was represented above as (Det) N \bar{n} - N rather than (Det) N \bar{n} - Adj, with serious doubts in mind whether there is at all a separate word-class of adjectives in Coptic used to describe properties of individuals and objects?

⁴ Bare nouns (or zero-determined nouns) have a restricted use in Coptic, they appear only in a range of well-defined syntactic environments, such as the negative existential contexts, in comparisons and enumerations (kind-referring use), as well as in the predicative use (as complements of the locative-identificational preposition n -). Cf. Reintges (2004: 66-67); see also: Till (1961: 63-64 §§104-108 „*Artikellosigkeit*”); Shisha-Halevy (1986: 141-153); Satzinger (1992: 77-78); Layton (2000: 40 §47).

The syntactic environments in which only an adjective can appear⁵ are practically absent in Coptic (e.g. comparison), or else, the two categories (nouns and adjectives) become neutralized in these environments (predicative use). The usual criterion for an adjective as a lexical category requires that it be directly adjoined to a head-noun as an attributive modifier. In Coptic, however, one hardly finds any constituent that adjoins *directly* to another, with *no* linking element. Coptic adjectives are not marked morphologically either. On the other hand, a functional definition according to which adjectives primarily express properties and therefore appear as modifiers within a noun phrase is too general for the separation of a lexical category.

Before proceeding with the treatment of this problem, it is worth noting that there *is* a closed set of Coptic nouns functioning as a kind of remnant adjective class, and they follow the head noun *directly*. First of all, Layton's genderless suffixes (2000: §112(iii)) can fall under this category, e.g. -**AC** 'old', -**NOYCE** 'pleasant, enjoyable'. The head-noun which they are attached to often undergoes stress reduction in a kind of *construct state* manner. Cf. **EPN-AC** 'vintage wine' (but also **HPN-N-AC**). The so-called 'unmediated attributive pattern', the **WHPE WHM** type (Layton 2000: §101) can be readily grouped together with the former, as only three adjectives occur in it: **KOYI**, **NOB** and **WHM**; moreover, it is the only possible construction for **WHM** to appear. What these two cases have in common is that they both seem to be *compounds* rather than constructions for two reasons: on the one hand, the *construct state* formation is no longer a productive operation in Coptic noun phrase, at least in syntax. On the other hand, the compound nature of the **WHPE WHM** pattern can be easily argued for by the fact that the determiner-like universal quantifier **NIM** does not intervene the two elements of such a construction:⁶

- (14) a. **WHPE WHM NIM** [Matt 2:16] instead of b. ***WHPE NIM WHM**
 boy small all boy all small
 'all the male children'

Keeping the above exceptional class apart, the overall nominal character of Coptic "adjectives" has been observed and pointed out by several authors.⁷ On the word of Chris Reintges (2004: 90 §3.1.3.1), "property-denoting expressions like **NOB** 'big' or **CAVE** 'intelligent' cannot be distinguished syntactically from referring expressions like **POME** 'man', since both types of nominals can be used as the head or the modifier of an adjectival construction".

Indeed, the lexical members of the phrases in (15) below⁸ can be interchanged freely, whereas the place of the linking element is fixed. Put differently, the linking

⁵ Baker: (2003: 191); see also chapter 2 of Bhat (1994) for the criteria for differentiation of adjectives.

⁶ Cf. Layton (2004: §96(b)). See also Stern (1880: §194): *Attributive Annexion*. The "regular" pattern would be **WHPE NIM N-DIKAIOS** 'all the righteous children', in which the attributive expansion *follows* the noun + **NIM** complex. Formally speaking, the quantifier **NIM** is added to the attributive construction as a whole, but **NIM**, being an enclitic element morphologically, must attach to the first phonological word from the right.

⁷ Shisha-Halevy (1986: 129-131), Reintges (2004: 90). The title of the relevant chapter in Ariel Shisha-Halevy's Grammar from 1986 is actually a question: *The adnominal modifier: A definable 'adjective' category in Coptic?*

⁸ BG 121,14 and 121,2; after Till (1961: §117). Additional examples *inter alia*: Layton (1990 & 2000: 83-84 §102), Reintges (2004: 90-91 §3.1.3.1).

element does not necessarily join the adjective-like modifier, but invariably the second of the two members of an attributive construction, independently of its supposed status of semantic modifier or modified. In Layton's term (2000: §99, §102), example (15a) is a mediated attributive construction, while (15b) is an inverted attributive construction:

- (15) a. $\pi\text{-}\rho\omega\mu\epsilon$ $\bar{\nu}\text{-}\alpha\tau\mu\omicron\gamma$ b. $\pi\text{-}\alpha\tau\mu\omicron\gamma$ $\bar{\nu}\text{-}\rho\omega\mu\epsilon$
DEF.SG.M-man ADJ.PRT-immortal DEF.SG.M-immortal ADJ.PRT-man
 'the immortal man' 'the immortal man'

This type of word order variation is a particularly interesting (and partly unsolved) syntactic problem, which can be shortly summarized as follows. The main issue is whether the syntactic nucleus coincides with the semantic nucleus or not, as Ariel Shisha-Halevy puts it, who analyses all the cases in terms of placement opposition (1986: 132-138). If the placement opposition is not suppressed by some lexically motivated condition (i.e. quantifiers prefer the first place, while certain individual lexemes the second), adjective-like nouns may occur in both first and second place position, that is to say, on both sides of the linking element. The inverted pattern is used to express an affective or emotive charge or a contrastively distinctive, antithetic role,⁹ and as such it seems to be motivated primarily by pragmatic factors. It is probably a secondary phenomenon developed only in the Coptic phase (or directly before Coptic), and is most likely to have emerged only after the *N N-N* pattern had already been fully established and grammaticalized for the attributive construction.

The above statement by Reintges (2004: 90) is, however, an over-generalization. There *are* syntactic and even morpho-syntactic strategies as to separate an adjective class, or at least a subclass of nouns that are typically used as modifiers. As for the morpho-syntactic criterion, the lexemes in question have no inherent grammatical gender.¹⁰ While some of them still have a morphological masculine or feminine (or even a plural) form (e.g. $\text{C}\alpha\text{B}\epsilon/\text{C}\alpha\text{B}\text{H}$ cf. the list of Layton: 2000: §114b), the use of these forms depends on the gender of the head-noun, that is to say, the suitable form is selected by the nucleus of the attributive construction.

Although such 'genderless common nouns' are rather rare in the native word-stock, the great number of *Greek loan-adjectives*, which entered this category, proves it to be an open word class. Greek adjectives are usually borrowed in their singular, masculine, nominal case form, but genderless into Coptic, as they appear to modify both masculine and feminine nouns. Interestingly, in the case of loan-adjectives, an

⁹ For instance, "pejorative or disapproving attributes" are observed to be more suitable for the inverted construction. The affective character is reinforced by the frequent co-occurrence of the inverted pattern with the $\pi\text{-}$ determination, the emphatic form of the definite article, cf. Polotsky (1957: 229)

¹⁰ Therefore Bentley Layton calls them 'genderless common nouns' (2000: §§113-117). In his earlier work on noun phrases (1990: 84-87) two sets of nouns are distinguished. Set (a) of simple Completers is a set of morphs that express everywhere qualification and nowhere denotation, and do not show a stable, associated gender (= 'genderless common nouns' in Layton 2000), and Set (b), which contains all other nouns that can have a denotative as well as a qualifying actualization (being indifferent to gender only in the latter case). This latter class corresponds to 'gendered common nouns' in his grammar of 2000.

animateness split developed: the endings may vary according to the agreement with animate vs. inanimate nouns, as illustrated in (16)-(17):¹¹

- (16) ΟΥ-ΦΥΧΙΚΟΣ ΔΕ Ν-ΡΩΜΕ [1Cor 2:14] (17) ΣΩΜΑ Ν-ΦΥΧΙΚΟΝ [1Cor 15:44]
INDF.SG-natural PRT ADJ.PRT-man body ADJ.PRT-natural
 ‘A natural person’ ‘(A) natural body’

Another important *syntactic* criterion for distinguishing the adjectival sub-class may be formed in terms of the placement opposition problem. Adjective-like genderless common nouns can appear in both mediated and inverted constructions without giving up their modifier function, remaining the semantic satellite even if becoming the syntactic nucleus. However, gendered common nouns can be modifiers only in the second (syntactically satellital) position; if they appear in the first position, and are the syntactic nucleus or the head-noun, they must be interpreted as the semantic nucleus as well, and the other member of the construction will fulfil the modifier function.¹² Therefore, the combination of some formal criteria and the semantic content of such lexemes will bring out a class of words that might as well be called adjectives.¹³

The problem of adjectival category arose in relation to the earlier language phases as well, having already been addressed in a paper by Wolfgang Schenkel (1967: 77-79), who suggested abandoning the adjectival category from the morphology,¹⁴ and using this term, instead, for a syntactically defined group of words, the function of which is just partly identical. Whatever can appear as an attribute must be called adjective.

Sami Uljas (2007) presents the former approaches exhaustively providing further references regarding both to general linguistics and Egyptological literature. He critically analyses the previous approaches (such as the grammar of adjectives as part of the nominal syntax, the supposed participial nature of adjectives both in modifier and predicative use, the attributive constructions as appositive constructions, etc.), and also points out the overlap of adjectival syntax with verbal expressions (e.g. in negated predicative use). Instead of establishing word-classes, Sami Uljas proposes a use- and construction-specific approach, according to which the so-called ‘property concept’ words “represent functionally unspecified lexical items that can enter into various construction templates where they are assigned a function as some of the traditionally identified parts of speech”, and claims that “in Earlier Egyptian expressions describing ‘property concepts’ should be seen as ‘adjectives’, ‘verbs’ etc. *in construction* only and that function arises from the latter” (2007: 247). Solving the problem of the adjectival category either for earlier phases or for Coptic is beyond the

¹¹ Girgis (1976-78: §96); Shisha-Halevy (1986: §4.2.2.1); Layton (2000: §114a and §117c). Occasionally feminine endings also can be attested, cf. Girgis 1976-78: §97; especially with non-human items in a few lexically fixed expressions (Layton 2000: §117c); See also Shisha-Halevy (1986: 137 *obs.*11).

¹² Cf. Shisha-Halevy (1986: 132-135)

¹³ As also noted in the second edition of Layton’s grammar (2004: §113). Ariel Shisha-Halevy (1986: 133) concludes something similar: “An adjective will be defined below as a modifier for which a shift in placement (...) does not bring about an internal semantic reversal of that order (...) the inter-constituent relationship remains constant”. He defines “adjective as any specific noun lexeme (N^x) featuring in both following paradigms: (a) ‘N → n-N^x’ (b) ‘N^x → n-N’, i.e. having the privilege of both first- and second-place positions.” (1986: 135)

¹⁴ Arguing that the agreement is not an exclusive characteristic of the ‘adjective’ group (consider *sdm.tj.fj* from), and is not obligatory either for all the members within the group (*nb*).

scope of this paper. Nevertheless, in reconstructing the process of grammaticalization, it will be of some importance that a sub-group of nouns can still be distinguished from ordinary substantives in Coptic by their specific features and behaviour.

The difference between the Coptic attributive and possessive *pattern A* has been shown in the previous sections. However, the linking element featured in both constructions seems to be identical. Ariel Shisha-Halevy (1986: 130) calls the *nota relationis* the “modifier and relator signal *par excellence*”. It is noteworthy that, at the beginning of his book, he himself draws attention to the difficult theoretical problem of identity vs. homonymy (1986: 6 n19). I believe that the case of *nota relationis* serves as a very good example for the dilemma: the linking element in the possessive and that in the attributive constructions are apparently the same, but the formal identity can be defended only in historical terms. On a synchronic level, because of the different syntactic environments in which the two morphemes occur, it is a mere homonymy.

3 Reconstruction of the diachronic process

The formal likeness of the two linking elements is obviously not a matter of chance. From a diachronic point of view, the two morphemes are one and the same, since the source of the attributive construction is the possessive one. In the following sections, three aspects of this process will be investigated:

- The motivation: Why did the change have to take place?
- An overview of the syntactic and semantic preconditions for the grammaticalization process
- If the two constructions in Coptic originate from the same pattern, yet become different, how can this development be explained?

3.1 Motivation

The need for a new construction probably may be connected with the decline of the adjectival category – had one occurred at all. The well-known fact that the agreement on adjectives (i.e. the feminine and plural endings) gradually disappears in Late Egyptian is but a mere question of morphology rather than that of syntax. At the same time, however, two other important phenomena can be observed: 1.) Nisbation, a productive device in Earlier Egyptian so as to derive adjectives from nouns and prepositions ceased to be productive, with the remaining representatives being lexicalized items.¹⁵ In lack of a productive adjectival derivational method, new strategies were needed to relate two nouns in a way that one of these nouns is intended not for referring but classifying or characterizing the other. 2.) Further important changes are to be observed in the predicative use of adjectives as well: the old pattern, the *nfr sw* construction, while still present in LE texts (in more conservative registers), is gradually replaced by other strategies: first, by nominal sentence patterns and Cleft Sentence, and later on also by a new set of adjective-verbs derived by means of a *n3-* prefix. At the end of this process, Coptic has the following devices to express adjectival predication: the nominal sentence, the *n3-nfr* > **ⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲥ**

¹⁵ Junge (1996: 67), Černý–Groll (1978: 83)

type verboids, and the stative constructions.¹⁶ This overall process must have concurred with a gradual deflation of the word-stock performing the traditional adjectival functions.

3.2 Syntactic and semantic preconditions for the **N**-marked attribution

The syntactic and semantic preconditions for the development of the **N**-marked attribution were present in earlier language phases, considering the fact that an alternative strategy to express attributive relationship had already existed from the very beginning. The so-called indirect genitive was occasionally used to express the relationship between two nouns, which is more like an attribution than a possessive one.

Alan Gardiner states in his Middle Egyptian grammar (1957: §94.2) that the adjective may “follow its noun as an indirect genitive”. His example is cited under (18), which is completed here with further ones to illustrate the phenomenon:¹⁷

- (18) ϵ n $\underline{t}bwt$ n $\underline{h}d$
 pair of sandal of white
 ‘(a) pair of white sandals’
- (19) $\underline{j}t.f$ wj r $s.t=f$ $n.t$ $sn\dot{d}m$ [Sh.S. 77-78]
 carry-3SG.M me to place-3SG of resting
 ‘He carried me to his resting-place’
- (20) m $dp.t$ $n.t$ $m\dot{h}$ 120 m $\dot{z}w=s$ $m\dot{h}$ 40 m $wsh=s$ [Sh.S. 25-26]
 in boat of cubit 120 in length-3SG.F cubit 40 in width-3SG.F
 ‘In a boat of 120 cubits in length and 40 cubits in width’
- (21) $n\dot{j}w.t$ $n.t$ $n\dot{h}\dot{h}$
 ‘(A) city of eternity’ or ‘eternal city’ (= necropolis)
- (22) hr n rmt [Ham. 191,6]
 face of man
 ‘human-faced’
- (23) $m\dot{s}\epsilon$ n z 3000 [Ham. 114]
 army of man 3000
 ‘An army of 3000 men’
- (24) $n\dot{h}\dot{z}w$ n $m\dot{f}k\dot{z}t$ [Westcar 6,5-6]
 ‘Jewelry of turquoise’

The qualifying-adjectival nature of this usage of the indirect genitive has been noted by several researchers with special regard to its Late Egyptian occurrence where the fully developed determiner-system makes it more detectable: the absence of an article before the second element of the construction and thus the non-referring use of these

¹⁶ On the one hand, the stative of intransitive verbs whose infinitive expresses process or entry into a state, e.g. ϵ - $\underline{o}y\dot{o}r\dot{w}$ ‘it is white’; on the other, the stative construction of the \underline{o} \bar{n} - type, e.g. ϵ - $\underline{n}\bar{n}\bar{o}\bar{s}$ ‘it is great’, cf. Layton (2000: §168b and §179). For Late Egyptian, see Junge (1996: 182-183). For the $n\dot{z}$ - $n\dot{f}$ type adjective verbs in Demotic, see Spiegelberg (1925: §117), Johnson (1976: 29-30), Simpson (1996: 127-128), and a list of Coptic adjective verbs can be found at Shisha-Halevy (1988: 196), and Layton (2000: §376).

¹⁷ Examples (21)-(24) are borrowed from Shisha-halevy (2007: 240)

nouns become “visible” in this language phase.¹⁸ Adolf Erman and Friedrich Junge offered a typological classification of the cases in which this construction is used (25)-(28). It is noteworthy that many of the Middle Egyptian examples can be grouped under the same categories:

– Material or composition

(25) *p3 htm n nbw* [HorSeth 6,1]
 ‘The signet-ring of gold’

– Measure, size and content

(26) *wʿ tbw n hnq.t* [pD’Orb 8,6]
 ‘A jar of beer’

– Nature and origin

(27) *qs n rmt* [Lansing 7,8]
 bone of man
 ‘human bone’

– Abstract nouns, infinitives

(28) *p3y=j ʿnh n m3ʿ.t* [Amarna Boundary Stela S, 13]
 my oath of truth
 ‘my true oath’

This listing, however, is not exhaustive. Adolf Erman himself noted that the construction can simply indicate *general relatedness* to something.

As opposed to verbal patterns, the demotic noun phrase structure has never been thoroughly examined. Notable exceptions to this overall picture are Simpson’s grammar based on the Ptolemaic sacerdotal decrees (1996: Part 1) and the insightful observations made by Shisha-Halevy (1989: §3) describing the language of P. Vandier. Demotic shows a considerable progress towards the Coptic system: the traditional way of attribution (an adjective following the head-noun directly, unmediated, showing some trace of gender-number agreement) becomes extremely restricted. As Simpson demonstrates (1996: 50-52 §2.2), the decrees – in accordance with the data from other demotic texts – provide evidence for only a small number of lexemes capable of entering the classical direct attributive construction.¹⁹ At the same time, there are several *n*-marked attributives attested in the same corpus (examples on pages 51-52), which resemble those of the earlier patterns in Middle and Late Egyptian.

However, the interpretation of the demotic data gives rise to some serious problems to be faced: apart from the fact that the *n*- morpheme is functionally overloaded – and as such ambiguous sometimes – the linking element is simply not written out in several cases, which may lead to confusion with apposition or co-ordination.²⁰

As far as the semantic preconditions for the spread and functional extension of the *n*-marked pattern are concerned, the following two matters are worth mentioning:

¹⁸ Erman (1933: 93-95 §§209-212), Junge (1996: 65, beschreibende Näherbestimmung = descriptive specification). See also Korostovtsev (1973: 102 §85) phenomenon of ‘translation’.

¹⁹ Cf. also Spiegelberg (1925 §67)

²⁰ In such cases only the syntactic environment may be decisive in distinguishing the patterns, see Simpson (1996: 72).

possessive constructions in general are used not only to express the possessive relationship proper, but readily encode other types of semantic relationships as well, such as appurtenance, relationship of part to whole, component to system, specification of material, source, origin, quantity, place, time, or simply relatedness – just to mention a few of the possible relation-types that are not formally distinguished in several languages of the world.

An additional issue worth noting lies in the fact that both possessive and attributive relationships share a kind of restrictive function. Possessors can typically serve as an anchoring device; a reference point for the head noun, that is to say, the referent of a noun can be identified, restricted via its relation to the referent of the possessor.²¹ On the other hand, attributes are comparable to the relative clauses, as they restrict the possible references of the head noun by classifying it in a characteristic group or category. For instance, the expression *qs n rmt* ‘a human bone’ restricts the potential referents to a narrower set of possible *denotatum*s, to be precise, to the bones that belong to a human creature.²²

As for the nouns featured in the above demonstrated pseudo-genitive construction in the pre-Coptic phases, it has been established that these nouns typically denote materials, abstract notions; they are kind-referring, class-referring, etc. Comparing this list with the (selective) semasiological sub-grouping prepared by Shisha-Halevy (1986: 134 §4.2.1.2.1) for the ‘gendered common nouns’, which take the second-place position (but not the first) as modifiers in attributive constructions, the categories can be concluded to be more or less identical. Considering the question from this point of view, there is nothing remarkable in the practice that ‘gendered common nouns’ may appear in Coptic attributive constructions: actually *these pseudo-genitive patterns with classifying, categorizing nouns provided the structural prototype for an alternative way of attribution*. What was an absolute innovation is that the common semantic features shared by property-assignment and classification could lead to a new system in which prototypical adjectives (or call them ‘genderless common nouns’) also entered this pseudo-genitive pattern, with the old regular unmediated attributive patterns becoming irregular remnants. My claim is that as soon as the *n*-marked construction became open for both gendered and genderless common nouns, it completely detached from the possessive patterns, and, consequently, the *nota relationis* started a new career as a generalized modifier marker.

3.3 Generalized adnominal modifier-marker

A further argument for the *generalized modifier marker* nature of the **n**- in attributive constructions is that it may have a Prepositional Phrase (PP) complement as well. A PP-modifier within a noun phrase is not a frequent phenomenon in Coptic, and was never so in earlier phases of Egyptian either, as the NP PP sequence can itself (without a copula) constitute an independent sentence, the so-called First Present or

²¹ Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001: 964) with further references

²² Such a qualified noun on its turn, need not to refer to a concrete individual or item. This is why a Coptic attributive construction can have any kind of determiner including the zero-determination. An interesting intergrading form between the two types is the *p3 A n w6 B* possessive pattern. E. g. Dem. *t3 šr.t n w6 mr-mš6* ‘the daughter of a general’ [I Setne 3:1] or *t3 s-ħm.t n ky* ‘the wife of another’ [Insinger 7:22] where the *rectum* does not contain an identifiable phrase, thus the genitive is not relational, cf. Simpson (1996: 71-72).

adverbial sentence. In Earlier Egyptian, prepositions were normally converted to the corresponding *nisbe* adjective, if intended to modify a noun: *ntrw jmjw pt* instead of *ntrw m pt*.²³ In Coptic, PP-modifiers within a noun phrase, might be introduced by a relative converter, or else, by the mediation of **N-**, the same linking element as that of the attributive construction (30), though this operation remains optional (31).²⁴

(29) Π-ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ Ἰ-ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ [ShIII 58:29]
DEF.SG.M-gospel ADJ.PRT-according.to John
 ‘The gospel according to John’

(30) ΟΥ-ΩΝΩ Ἰ-ΩΑ ΕΝΕΩ [Mt 25:46]
INDF.SG-life ADJ.PRT-till eternity
 ‘An eternal life’

(31) Π-ΩΝΩ ΩΑ ΕΝΕΩ [Mark 10:17]
DEF.SG.M-life till eternity
 ‘Eternal life / Living forever’

4 The exact time of the grammaticalization

At this point a natural question arises: when did the **N**-marked pattern become grammaticalized in such a way that adjective-like elements could also enter the construction?

One has to face serious problems when trying to define the relative date of the complete grammaticalization. It obviously took place sometime before Coptic, but the largest part of Coptic words which may be at all assigned the name ‘adjectives’ is made up of Greek loan adjectives. Greek loanwords probably entered the spoken language in the pre-Coptic phase on an increasing scale, as it is proved by their extremely large proportion in the Coptic vocabulary by the time Coptic script emerged. Written Demotic, however, is characterized by a rigid resistance to foreign influences. Demotic seems entirely to ignore the Greek language.²⁵ The purist nature of Demotic is also confirmed by the fact that it doesn’t reflect several grammatical and lexical changes that appear in Coptic seemingly without any precedent (e.g. the unexpected appearance of the genitive construction with ἸΤΕ or the dislocation pattern with ἸΩΙ. Ray 1994: 260-261). It is quite possible that the **N**-marked attributive construction was one of the colloquial constructions suppressed by the conservatism of written Demotic – i.e. screened from view by an overall diglossia-effect.

²³ The only apparent exception being the partitive construction. Jean Winand kindly drew my attention to an expression also appearing in the Story of Sinuhe, where a possessive marker is followed by a prepositional phrase: *iw=j hr hs.wt n.t hr nswt* ‘I was in the favor of the king’ (Sin B309-310). Alan Gardiner (1957: §158) had mentioned it among other similar phenomenon considering *hr nswt* as an idiomatic phrase, which serves as a noun (§158.2) rather than as a true PP complement. The honorific transposition in both versions of the above mentioned Sinuhe locus may support Gardiner’s view (and be against the prepositional analysis) as well as the fact that in the ostracon version (BM 5629) an ending *-t* is added to *hr*.

²⁴ For the PP appearing as a bare adnominal modifiers without the linking element, see Layton (2000: §124 and 103b); Cf. also Till (1961: §116).

²⁵ Greek loanwords are limited to a few predictable categories. Willy Clarysse lists less than 100 items, a surprisingly small number. The majority of the words are titles, so called international words (clothing, spices, minerals), or come from technical, scientific, military and financial fields (Clarysse 1987)

At the moment, I can see two possible research directions on this dating problem worth developing in a future investigation:

1.) The systematic study of the class of adjective-like lexemes still in use in Coptic (Layton's genderless common nouns), which belong to the native word-stock, and may enter in the **n**-marked (mediated or inverted) attributive construction.²⁶ It would be reasonable to include the data from several dialects in order to enlarge the body of evidence and the numbers of possible lexemes. Furthermore, it needs investigation how these lexemes behaved in earlier language phases, especially in late Demotic texts from the Roman period.

2.) Study of the data coming from such contexts as the Medinet Madi archive, a collection of ostraka from the first half of the 2nd century AD, which, to some extent, seem to reveal the contemporary spoken variety of the language.²⁷

5 Concluding remarks

A final question I would like to propose is the following: If the possessive and attributive patterns really have the same source, why did the two constructions not coincide completely in Coptic?

It has been observed that the second, **n**-marked element of an attributive construction is always undetermined. On the other hand, the possessive *Pattern A* is also distinguished by the obligatory definiteness of its head-noun. When explaining how this obligatory definiteness developed, I rely on Leo Depuydt's theory, which, at the time of composing this paper, was still available in a manuscript form only (soon to appear as reported by the author). According to his idea, the whole process began with the emergence of the possessive article in Late Egyptian, as a consequence of which, a new strategy was needed for expressing a pronominal possessor with indefinite possessed nouns and nouns modified by demonstratives. The process is, of course, more complicated than summarized here, but the main point is that the new strategy introduced for these pronominal possessors (i.e. the application of the preposition *mdj/mtw*) later spread over the patterns with nominal possessors as well, producing a completely split system in the Coptic possessives (*Pattern A* and *B*), and a highly regularized use of *Pattern A* in terms of a strictly adjacent and obligatorily definite possessed noun. This change within the possessive system enabled the reanalysis of the attributive constructions and an independent path of grammaticalization: the semantically vacuous *nota relationis* in attributive patterns did not take part in the definiteness opposition and became a generalized modifier-marker.

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²⁶ For a list of lexemes in question, see: Shisha-Halevy (1986: 135 §4.2.2), Layton (2000: 91 §114)

²⁷ See Bresciani – Pintaudi (1987) for a general description, and Pernigotti (1984: 788-789) for the observable dialectal peculiarities of the Fayumic dialect in the texts. Greek nouns can have a Demotic definite article and Greek verbs in the infinitive are combined with the Egyptian auxiliary *ir* ('to do') in a series of periphrastic tenses according to the later practice of certain Coptic dialects. Previously invisible grammatical constructions and sound changes are observable as well. For further examples, see: Ray (1994: 257-258).

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