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P. KOUSOULIS and N. LAZARIDIS



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GREEK LOANWORDS AND TWO GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF PRE-COPTIC EGYPTIAN

Barbara EGEDI
(Hungarian Academy of Science)

Introduction

The linguistic situation in Egypt during the period from the third century BC to the third century AD (from the time of Ptolemaic rule to the emergence of Coptic script) is very complex and intriguing. While the primary written form of Egyptian language had long been the Demotic, limited uses of hieroglyphic script and certain forms of Hieratic also survived. As a consequence of Egypt's occupation by the Greeks and its effect on the economic and political life, the Greek language gained a comparatively great importance, and a bilingual social stratum gradually evolved primarily in the northern part of the country.

While the Demotic was the script widely used among Egyptians, the language itself was subject to a strong diglossia, an otherwise normal phenomenon, characteristic in every phase of the Egyptian language¹. Accordingly, the spoken version departed from the written form until the Demotic script itself started to decline and was finally replaced by Coptic.

The linguistic relationship between Coptic and Demotic is far from being understood. It is a well-known fact that Coptic cannot be considered as the direct successor of Demotic. Although the former succeeds the latter in time, an unexpected number of lexical and grammatical differences may be detected. Demotic is characterised by a stiff resistance to foreign influences, and, at the same time, new grammatical constructions and elements appear in Coptic seemingly without any precedent, not to mention the extremely large number of Greek loanwords in the Coptic vocabulary.

The evolution of this hidden spoken Egyptian (pre-literal or simply pre-Coptic) will be the subject of my investigation. Even though the actual circumstances in which the borrowing of Greek words took place remain mostly unrevealed, it is, nonetheless, in the way the Greek words had been integrated into the Egyptian grammatical system that certain properties of the spoken Egyptian can be understood. Two concrete cases

¹ Cf. A. LOPRIENO, 'Linguistic variety and Egyptian literature', in: A. LOPRIENO (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature. History and Forms*, Probleme der Ägyptologie 10 (Leiden/New York/Köln, 1996), 515-29; P. VERNUS, 'Langue littéraire et diglossie', in: LOPRIENO (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 555-65.

will be examined in my paper: firstly, the productivity of the plural suffix attached also to Greek nouns, and secondly, the much debated issue concerning the borrowing of Greek verbs seen from a morphological point of view. My analysis will be based on the fundamental principle that it is the grammar of the borrower language that conditions in what form the loanword is to be integrated into the new linguistic environment.

Bilingualism and diglossia in Egypt

Bilingualism

The Egyptian-Greek contacts, primarily of commercial nature, can be traced back to the second millennium BC, but evidence for permanent Greek presence in Egypt is available only from the seventh century BC, when Ionian (and Carian) soldiers served as mercenaries for the rulers of the Saite dynasty, and were allowed to establish settlements in the Delta region². It was the first time that they could mix with the native population, although the Egyptian language remained unaffected by the Greek presence until the arrival of Alexander the Great and the Macedonian conquest. From that point onwards, however, Greek became the language of the resident dynasty and its administration for centuries, accompanied by a mass immigration of Greek-speaking population. As a consequence of the economical and social pressure, a limited degree of bilingualism³ might have evolved as early as the first Ptolemies ruled over Egypt.

The need of Greek-speaking administrators for successful centralised control on the part of the ruling class, and the advantages ensured for the existing scribal class in exchange for their collaboration – as mutual interests, reinforced each other. The Ptolemaic educational program, i.e. the great number and privileged position of school teachers (being, for instance, exempted from taxes) is noteworthy. Knowledge of language (in other words Greek literacy) was the clue to social status and career. Accordingly, the first essential move towards bilingualism was achieved by educated Egyptians (the members of the Egyptian literate class), who from the second century BC infiltrated even into the higher bureaucracy. The assimilation also accelerated in the regions where Greek military and civil officials had been given lands in tenure (e.g. the Fayum region), favouring the formation of a mixed population.

² For the Egyptian-Greek relations before Alexander, see A.B. LLOYD, *Herodotus Book II. Introduction* (Leiden, 1975), 1-60. A short overview: B. VERBEECK, 'Greek language', in: A.S. ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (New York, 1991), 1165-6.

³ For bilingualism in general, see *inter alia* W. MACKEY, 'Bilingualism and Multilingualism', in: U. AMMON *et al.* (eds.), *Sociolinguistics*, Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, Band 3.1 (Berlin/New York, 1987), 699-713.

In the first decades of the Macedonian dominion the survived official documents were written predominantly in Demotic. It is only from the reign of Ptolemy II that a growing use of Greek may be observed, but its preference over Demotic quickly increased in course of time. Demotic maintained its position mostly in lower (and local) administration⁴.

In the Roman period, the official language of the eastern provinces was Greek rather than Latin. The ratio of Latin to Greek papyrological documents from Egypt is approximately 1 to 100. Latin was used exclusively among the highest administration: in the army and within the affairs of the central governance. Otherwise Greek was used⁵. During the Roman period a drastic decline of Demotic documents can be observed. Their use was limited to tax receipts, accounts, priestly agreements (concerning their rights and duties), and by the third century AD, merely to some magical texts and mummy labels⁶. This radical decline may be ascribed to the re-organisation of Egyptian administration. The Romans simply refused to accept documents written in Demotic. Thus, for much of the Roman period most Egyptians had no access to writing in their own language, which obviously promoted bilingualism among members of the middle class⁷.

There is direct and indirect evidence for such bilingualism: use of bilingual documents (synodal decrees, contracts, mummy labels, letters, tax receipts); bilingual archives; the use of rush (the standard Demotic writing implement) for Greek records instead of reed; wrong spellings and syntactic errors suggesting the employment of bilingual scribes (incorrect gender, mistaken case endings); interference (e.g. “Egyptianisms” in Greek texts)⁸. However, the proportions of bilingualism and the degree

⁴ For Ptolemaic administration and literacy, see D.J. THOMPSON, ‘Literacy and administration in early Ptolemaic Egypt’, in: J.H. JOHNSON (ed.), *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society. Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilisation 51 (Chicago, 1992), 323-6; D.J. THOMPSON, ‘Literacy and power in Ptolemaic Egypt’, in: A.K. BOWMAN and G. WOOLF (eds.), *Literacy and power in the ancient world* (Cambridge, 1994), 67-83. A short summary of the subject: R.S. BAGNALL, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 236; the Egyptian legal system was not abolished, just expanded by the Greek one (there were two separate courts for Egyptian and Greek lawsuits). However, the change in the relationship between the two systems affected language as well. A royal decree (*prostagma*) of 146 BC requires that all Egyptian contracts worked up in Demotic should be registered in Greek in an official registry-office or *grapheion*. Unrecorded Demotic contracts are invalid, cf. N. LEWIS, ‘The demise of the Demotic document: when and why’, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 79 (1993), 279; THOMPSON, in: BOWMAN and WOOLF (eds.), *Literacy and power*, 82.

⁵ J.N. ADAMS, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge, 2003), 527.

⁶ BAGNALL, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 236-7; a more extensive treatment of literacy and administration during the Roman period: P. FEWSTER, ‘Bilingualism in Roman Egypt’, in: J.N. ADAMS *et al.* (eds.), *Bilingualism in Ancient Society. Language Contact and the Written Word* (Oxford, 2002), 220-45; see also LEWIS, ‘The demise of the Demotic document’, 276-80.

⁷ It must not be forgotten that Demotic was steadily used for religious, magical and literary compositions (e.g. p. Insinger, Setna II, Myth of the Sun-Eye).

⁸ M. DEPAUW, *A Companion to Demotic Studies*, Papyrologica Bruxellensia 28 (Bruxelles, 1997), 41-5; FEWSTER, in: ADAMS *et al.* (eds.), *Bilingualism*, 228-40. From the Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine periods

of its permeation within the Egyptian society are unknown. Demotic seems entirely to ignore Greek language. Greek loanwords are limited to a few predictable categories⁹. In case the integration of a new term was inevitable, sometimes calquing was preferred to adoption¹⁰. This purism of Demotic (and its inclination for archaism) distorts the facts insomuch that the actual effects of bilingual speakers on Egyptian language are hardly attested only by linguistic means. In fact, the use of the different languages and writings is divided rather functionally. Thus we should better speak about diglossia¹¹, when defining the relationship between Demotic and Coptic (or, more precisely, pre-Coptic).

Diglossia

As its name implies, Demotic is often considered as colloquial (insofar it reflects the spoken language of that time). Nevertheless, already the earliest Demotic documents are often formulaic and conservative by nature, being for the most part legal documents and official letters¹².

Coptic script developed by adopting the Greek alphabet in the course of the first centuries AD and it was essentially employed for the translation of the Holy Scriptures¹³.

there is more extensive evidence of bilingual interference in the phonology of the Greek *koine* spoken in Egypt, cf. F.T. GIGNAC, 'Phonology of the Greek of Egypt, Influence of Coptic on the XXX', in: ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8 (New York, 1991), 186-8.

⁹ W. 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: W. CLARYSSE, 'Greek Loan-Words in Demotic', in: S.P. VLEEMING (ed.), *Aspects of Demotic Lexicography. Acts of the Second International Conference for Demotic Studies*, Studia Demotica 1 (Leuven, 1987), 9-33. For 14 additional items see the 'Appendix: Greek loan-words in demotic, an update', in: K. VANDORPE and W. CLARYSSE, 'A Greek winery for sale in a Fayum Demotic Papyrus', in: A.M.F.W. VERHOOGT and S.P. VLEEMING (eds.), *Two faces of Graeco-Roman Egypt. Greek and Demotic and Greek-Demotic texts and studies presented to P.W. Pestman* (Leiden, 1998), 139. The literary composition of p.Insinger, dating to the Roman period, has only one Greek loan word ἑορτή > *hwrt* according to R.J. WILLIAMS, *The Morphology and Syntax of Papyrus Insinger*, PhD Diss. University of Chicago (Chicago, 1948), 4.

¹⁰ E.g. the term τράπεζα ("table" > "state bank"), an institution introduced by the Ptolemies, obviously was understood by Egyptians, but in Demotic the Egyptian word *shn* ("table") was used, cf. J.D. RAY, 'How demotic is demotic?', in: *Acta Demotica. Acts of Fifth International Conference for Demotists. Pisa, 4th – 8th September 1993*, Egitto e Vicino Oriente 17 (Pisa, 1994), 255. See also J. VERGOTE, 'Bilinguisme et calques en Égypte', in: *Atti del XVII. Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia*. Vol. III (Napoli, 1984), 1385-9. Another example could be the term *pš ntr pr* of the Rosetta stone for the epithet θεὸς ἐπιφανῆς of Ptolemy V.

¹¹ For the linguistic notion of diglossia, see C.A. FERGUSON, 'Diglossia', *Word* 15 (1959), 325-40.

¹² J.D. RAY, 'Literacy in Egypt in the Late and Persian periods', in: A.K. BOWMAN and G. WOOLF (eds.), *Literacy and power in the ancient world* (Cambridge, 1994), 56-60.

¹³ I am not concerned here with the so-called Old Coptic texts, which are, of course, the precursors of the Coptic *script*, but comparable to Demotic in their reluctance to Greek influence, cf. H. SATZINGER, 'Old Coptic', in: ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, 174. For an analysis of the motivation to create a systematic script for spoken Egyptian employing the Greek alphabet see D.R. MCBRIDE, 'The

The extremely large number of Greek words in Coptic (one-fifth of the standard Coptic vocabulary) is often explained by the adoption of Christian religion and the influence of translation from Greek. But the latter explanation ignores the fact that also prepositions (κατα, παρα), sentence particles (αλλα, γαρ, δε) and common everyday words were adopted, which must be the result of a development of a long period and the cohabitation for centuries¹⁴.

Demotic, in turn, doesn't reflect certain grammatical and lexical changes, which must have already characterised the spoken language: the perfect *sḏm.f* form is suddenly replaced by the systematic use of Coptic ⲁϣϣⲱⲧⲙ̅. Other examples could be the unexpected appearance of the genitive construction with ⲛⲧⲉ or the dislocation pattern with ⲛⲃⲓ. Surprisingly, some very frequent lexemes are replaced by new ones¹⁵. Moreover, Demotic disregards not only the foreign influences (language contact), but the local or regional differences (dialects) as well. At the same time, early Coptic texts distinguish six main dialects, thus reflecting the contemporary linguistic reality.

The paucity of Greek loanwords in Demotic and its reluctance to language change and language variation may be due to conservatism and diglossia. Consequently, Demotic gradually departed from the spoken language. The sole exception to this pattern is provided by the findings from Medinet Madi: an archive of about 1500 ostraka found in a village temple during Italian excavations at Narmouthis (Medinet Madi, Fayum)¹⁶. The area was inhabited by a high number of new settlers and therefore relatively Hellenised. The ostraka were written in the first half of the second century AD and a considerable part of them belongs to a collection of school texts. What is particularly interesting about these texts is that, in some extent, they seem to reveal the spoken language: they contain a relatively large number of Greek words (also common lexemes) written in the Greek alphabet – fitted from left to right into the Demotic text that runs from right to left. A more striking phenomenon is that 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 well¹⁷. But the very best evidence

Development of Coptic: Late-pagan Language of Synthesis in Egypt', *The Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 19 (1989), 89-111.

¹⁴ RAY, in: *Acta Demotica*, 256; RAY, 'Literacy in Egypt', 60.

¹⁵ See RAY, in: *Acta Demotica*, 260-1 for this issue and further examples.

¹⁶ For a general description: E. BRESCIANI and R. PINTAUDI, 'Textes démotico-grecs et greco-démotiques des ostraca de Medinet Madi: un problème de bilinguisme', in: S.P. VLEEMING (ed.), *Aspects of Demotic Lexicography. Acts of the Second International Conference for Demotic Studies*, *Studia Demotica* 1 (Leuven, 1987), 123-6; See also FEWSTER, in: ADAMS *et al.* (eds.), *Bilingualism*, 221-4. An overall bibliography on Medinet Madi can be found at: <http://www.egittologia.unipi.it/pisaegypt/BibMedinet.htm>.

¹⁷ The consonantal change *h* > *š* is recognisable in the auxiliary of the *praesens consuetudinis*, or in the word *ḥm* > *šm* > ⲱⲙ "little". At the same time, the lambdacism and the ending *-i* of feminine nouns

for the conservatism of Demotic is Coptic itself: 20 percent of its vocabulary derives from Greek. The proportion of Greek words is similar in translations from Greek and in original compositions. After comparing 20 pages from the gospel of Matthew with 20 pages from the texts of Pachomius (otherwise ignorant of Greek), L. Lefort points out that the native composition has 25 percent more Greek words than the translated text¹⁸. Undoubtedly, Pre-Coptic spoken language had already absorbed Greek on an increasing scale by the time the Coptic script emerged¹⁹.

The question of the morphological plural

In Middle and Late Egyptian plural is marked by the endings *.w/.wt* in writing²⁰. When treating the progressive fall of the plural endings, A. Loprieno claims that the loss of final vowels and semi-consonants in later Egyptian favoured the emergence of new oppositions based on internal apophonic alternations between singular and plural forms²¹. However, there is no reason to suppose that the ablaut did not exist before²². Loprieno also assumes that, in certain cases, the three strokes in earlier hieroglyphic writing might have been the ideographic rather than phonetic indication of the plural, which implies that the apophonic alternation may have been sufficient in these cases to mark the singular/plural opposition already in earlier Egyptian²³.

The problem that concerns us here is *for how long* the inflection of morphological plural was productive. According to the written evidence, Demotic had a real, systematic plural ending, which is in striking contrast with the Coptic data. Morphological plurality can be observed only with a close set of Coptic nouns, therefore, on synchronic

allow us to see some dialectal peculiarities of the Fayumic dialect, cf. S. PERNIGOTTI, 'Il "Copto" degli ostraka di Medinet Madi', in: *Atti del XVII. Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia*. Vol. II (Napoli, 1984), 788-9. Further examples for the above-mentioned linguistic phenomena: RAY, in: *Acta Demotica*, 257-8.

¹⁸ L.T. LEFORT, 'Gréco-copte', in: *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum* (Boston, 1950), 66.

¹⁹ The fact that Coptic should be viewed as a parallel development to Demotic rather than as a successor was already pointed out by K. SETHE, 'Das Verhältnis zwischen Demotisch und Koptisch und seine Lehren für die Geschichte der ägyptische Sprache', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 79 (1925), 290-316.

²⁰ About the plural ending and its omission in ME/LE: A.H. GARDINER, *Egyptian Grammar. Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs* (Oxford, 1957), §§72-3; F. JUNGE, *Einführung in die Grammatik des Neuägyptischen* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 2.1.1. For the vocalic reconstruction of the plural endings, see J.B. CALLENDAR, 'Plural formation in Egyptian', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46 (1987), 27-37.

²¹ A. LOPRIENO, *Ancient Egyptian. A linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge, 1995), 61.

²² For the proposal of a special plural stem see W. SCHENKEL, *Aus der Arbeit an einer Konkordanz zu den altägyptischen Sargtexten. II: Zur Pluralbildung des Ägyptischen*, Göttinger Orientforschungen IV/12 (Wiesbaden, 1983), 177-8. After H. SATZINGER, 'Koptische Vokalphoneme und ägyptische Pluralformation', in: S. EMMEL *et al.* (eds.), *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster, 20.-26. Juli 1996*, Spachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients Band 6,2 (Wiesbaden, 1999), 365-74. (Unfortunately, I had no access to the original publication).

²³ LOPRIENO, *Ancient Egyptian*, 61-3.

level, it can be interpreted only as irregularity; the plural suffix could not be productive any more.

Example (1) shows that Coptic nouns are not marked morphologically for grammatical gender and number²⁴, hence these categories become visible only by means of the agreeing determinants, or cross-reference performed by personal pronouns.

(1)	π-ρωμε	τ-ρωμε	ḿ-ρωμε/ρωμε
	def:sg.m.-man	def:sg.f.-field	def:pl.-man/field
	the man	the field	the men/fields

Remnant plural forms show some sort of pattern, but their presence is not predictable, thus cannot be considered productive. I have to oppose the words of A. Shisha-Halevy²⁵ that “(morphologic) countability, more or less regular, widespread but unpredictable (subject to regulation as yet obscure)”. If a phenomenon is unpredictable, it cannot be called *regular*.

In his grammar, Ch. Reintges summarises how plural nouns are formed, distinguishing three different patterns²⁶:

- (i) Addition of the plural suffix –οογε, e.g. $\text{c}\beta\omega \sim \text{c}\beta\omega\omega\gamma\epsilon$ ²⁷
- (ii) So called “broken plural” expressed by changes in the vowel pattern and syllable structure of the nominal stem, e.g. $\text{e}\iota\omega\tau \sim \text{e}\iota\omega\tau\epsilon$, $\text{z}\tau\omega \sim \text{z}\tau\omega\omega\pi$
- (iii) Combination of (i) and (ii), e.g. $\text{x}\omega\epsilon\iota\text{c} \sim \text{x}\iota\text{c}\omega\omega\gamma\epsilon$

Although this plural forming does not seem to be systematic²⁸ or productive anymore, interestingly enough, some frequently used Greek nouns can be combined with Egyptian suffix:

- (2) $\Psi\chi\eta \sim \Psi\chi\omega\omega\gamma\epsilon$ “souls”, $\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\omega\lambda\eta \sim \epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\omega\lambda\omega\omega\gamma\epsilon$ “letters”²⁹

²⁴ Grammars usually list a few Coptic nouns marked for gender according to biological sex, e.g. $\text{c}\omega\eta \sim \text{c}\omega\eta\epsilon$ (B. LAYTON, *A Coptic Grammar with Chrestomathy and Glossary. Sahidic Dialect* [Wiesbaden, 2000], §107; Ch. REINTGES, *Coptic Egyptian (Sahidic Dialect). A learner's grammar*, Afrikawissenschaftliche Lehrbücher 15 [Köln, 2004], 52-3). There is a larger set of nouns marked for plural, e.g. $\text{c}\omega\eta \sim \text{c}\eta\eta\gamma$ (LAYTON, *A Coptic Grammar*, §108(b); see also J. VERGOTE, *Grammaire Copte. IIa. Morphologie syntagmatique. Syntaxe. Partie synchronique* [Louvain, 1983], §§115-20).

²⁵ A. SHISHA-HALEVY, *Coptic Grammatical Categories. Structural Studies in the Syntax of Shenoutean Sahidic*, *Analecta Orientalia* 53 (Rome, 1986), §4.0.2.

²⁶ REINTGES, *Coptic Egyptian*, 53-4, with further examples.

²⁷ LAYTON (*A Coptic Grammar*, §108(b)) lists more suffixes that seemingly have the element -γ in common. However, he also fails to mention the alternation (-ο ~ -οι) attested in $\text{z}\lambda\lambda\omega \sim \text{z}\lambda\lambda\omega\iota$.

²⁸ SATZINGER (‘Koptische Vokalphoneme’) proposes a systematic derivation for the plural formation of nouns ending in tonic syllable. He assumes that a kind of metathesis is responsible for the diphthongs which can be found in the plural forms. He basically treats the subject from a diachronic point of view, and does not touch on the question of productivity, so the critical analysis of his proposal cannot be the task of the present paper.

²⁹ REINTGES, *Coptic Egyptian*, 54.

W. Till points out that this operation is available for feminine Greek nouns only, and exclusively with the suffix $-\text{OOY}\epsilon$ ³⁰. Observing the more extensive list of F. Girgis³¹, it becomes clear that the form of the ending may vary in dialects ($-\text{OOY}\epsilon$ (S), $-\text{AY}\epsilon$ (A₂), $-\text{HOY}$ (F)). R. Kasser gives examples from more dialects as well, and also indicates that the above-mentioned suffix can link with Copto-Greek words ending in tonic “-ē” like $\Psi\chi\chi\eta$, on the analogy of Coptic nouns like $\text{T}\bar{\text{B}}\text{N}\eta \sim \text{T}\bar{\text{B}}\text{N}\text{OOY}\epsilon$ “cattle”³².

Morphological plurality is neither regular, nor predictable, operating only on a closed set of nouns. It is hardly surprising, then, that Greek substantives are used invariably in nominative singular form, as there is no Greek-like declension in Coptic, either. A similar phenomenon may be observed in the case of grammatical gender: Coptic, having two genders only (masculine and feminine), integrated an originally neuter Greek substantive as masculine. In short, it is the grammar of the borrower language that conditions in what form a loanword is to be integrated. That is why the combination of the $\Psi\chi\chi\eta$ -type Greek words with an Egyptian remnant suffix is so surprising.

The key-question of such an investigation is since when the plural suffix has become unproductive. The Demotic data are problematic: Demotic writing does mark the plural ending by a vertical sign that (contrary to former hieroglyphic usage) follows feminine ending and any other determinatives³³. This may suggest that the sign itself transcribed as $-w$ is no more than a determinative, merely signaling that the noun is perceived to be plural. It should be noted, however, that the 3rd person plural pronominal suffix was written with one and the same sign and it was necessarily pronounced (cf. its Coptic successor $-\text{OY}$). In addition, R. Simpson observes³⁴ that regular omission of the plural marker is much less frequent than that of the feminine ending (as far as the text corpora of the decrees are concerned).

Descriptive Demotic grammars generally take it for granted that plural marking was systematically realised, in spite of the fact that its productivity all of a sudden disappears in Coptic. Whereas Williams admits³⁵ that “it is likely that in many cases this consonant ($-w$) had disappeared from speech in this position”.

In my view, when Greek nouns capable of bearing Egyptian plural endings were eventually borrowed in Pre-Coptic, the suffix must have been still productive, even if limited to certain nominal classes only, characterised by the type of their vocalism or

³⁰ W.C. TILL, *Koptische Grammatik (Säidischer Dialekt)* (Leipzig, 1961), §86.

³¹ F.A. GIRGIS, ‘Greek Loan Words in Coptic’, *Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte* 21 (1971-1973) §90.

³² R. KASSER, ‘Vocabulary, Copto-Greek’, in: ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, 219.

³³ J.H. JOHNSON, *Thus Wrote ‘Onchsheshongy. An Introductory Grammar of Demotic*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilisation 45 (Chicago, 2000), §14; R.S. SIMPSON, *Demotic Grammar in the Ptolemaic Sacerdotal Decrees* (Oxford, 1996), 49.

³⁴ SIMPSON, *Demotic Grammar*, 50.

³⁵ WILLIAMS, *Papyrus Insinger*, 12-3.

syllable structure. A group of Greek loanwords, having a quasi similar make-up, was able to pick up the appropriate suffix. Unfortunately, it is impossible to define the exact time of borrowing for the above-mentioned effects of diglossia, but it certainly happened in a period when Egyptian plural forming was still a productive inflectional strategy.

The morphological process of inflection (in comparison with derivation) typically shows an unrestrained productivity since inflected forms have syntactic functions and do not create new words or concepts³⁶. Unproductive forms *can* be regular as well provided that they can be described by means of a rule not distinct from other rules of grammar. Yet, they remain historic relics for being unproductive by nature³⁷. Even if a phonological investigation happens to derive all the apparently irregular plural forms in Coptic and provide a systematic explanation for each and every morphological occurrence, after a certain point, the inflectional process cannot be considered productive as it does not operate on every possible input, which otherwise correspond to the formal requirements of the rule. Therefore, plural forming in Pre-Coptic exhibited certain regularity and productivity as revealed by Greek nouns in Coptic plural form, but ceased to be productive at an indefinable point, since there are numerous Greek loans in Coptic ending in tonic “-η” without the corresponding plural forms.

The question of loan verbs

As a consequence of the analytic nature of Coptic sentence patterns, Greek loan verbs can occur only in a single and unvarying form. Coptic grammars treat the verbal part of any conjugation pattern as an infinitive – essentially for historical considerations. Accordingly, it seems logical to assume that Greek loan verbs were adopted in their infinitival form as well. In the Sahidic dialect, as well as in some minor dialects³⁸, the morphological form of these verbs, strangely enough, seems to be the *imperfectum imperativi activi*, instead of the infinitive³⁹.

(3) ΠΙΣΤΕΥΕ ΠΙΣΤΕΥΕΙΝ, ΠΛΑΝΑ πλανᾶν, ΑΙΤΕΙ ΑΙΤΕΪΝ, ΜΑΣΤΙΓΟΥ ΜΑΣΤΙΓΟΥΝ,
ΑΓΩΝΙΖΕ ΑΓΩΝΙΖΕΣΘΑΙ

Opinions vary on the nature of these forms. According to G. Steindorff Greek infinitives were adopted in their late Greek form, which means that in active forms the word final

³⁶ G. KOEFOED and J. VAN MARLE, ‘Productivity’, in: G. BOOIJ *et al.* (eds.), *Morphologie. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Flexion und Wortbildung*, HSK Band 17.1 (Berlin/New York, 2000), 303.

³⁷ F. KIEFER, ‘Regularity’, in: BOOIJ *et al.* (eds.), *Morphologie*, 298.

³⁸ KASSER, in: ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, 220.

³⁹ LEFORT, in: *Studies Crum*, 68. See also L. STERN, *Koptische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1880), §331; G. STEINDORFF, *Lehrbuch der koptischen Grammatik* (Chicago/London, 1951), §284; TILL, *Koptische Grammatik*, §280.

-v, in medium forms the ending -σθαι was dropped⁴⁰. This hypothesis is problematic, however, in view of the Bohairic data. The Bohairic dialect actually adopts the Greek infinitival form (as clearly manifested by the endings -ΙΝ and -ΕCΘΕ), but always combined with the *status nominalis* of the Coptic verb ἰρἰ (εῖρ-) “to do”:

(4) εῖρεπιθῶμιΝ ἐπιθυμεῖν, εῖρετιΝ αἰτεῖν, εῖρκανδαλιζεCΘΕ σκανδαλιζεσθαι⁴¹

The use of an auxiliary verb seems superfluous if the Coptic verb position is reserved for the infinitive. It can be a strong argument, then, that the verbal slot was not felt nominal by the Coptic speakers. Accordingly, the “infinitive-adopting” approach will not be so straightforward in Sahidic, where loan verbs are integrated in the sentence without any auxiliary verb.

Beyond the infinitive vs. imperative discussion there is a third approach to the question. In his review article A. Shisha-Halevy stresses that “in Sahidic, unlike many other dialects, we have (...) not the Greek morphological infinitive, but a Greek zero-affix form for the Coptic structural (syntactic) infinitival entity”⁴². A similar view is held by Ch. Reintges⁴³, who claims that Greek verbs are borrowed into Coptic as “bare” (i.e. uninflected) stems. He rejects the imperative approach since “imperative verb forms have an intrinsic addressee-related reference, and are therefore construed with an implicit or explicit second person subject pronoun”. Reintges suggests a light-verb theory instead: Copto-Greek verbs – he says – have the morphological structure of nouns, and must be inserted in the complement position of a light verb (εἰ)ρ- “to do”. Light verbs have little or no lexical meaning at all, and it is their nominal complement that represents the semantically meaningful predicate. In Bohairic this light verb is overt, while in Sahidic it is a covert one⁴⁴.

It is worth mentioning that the medium and passive infinitival endings (-εσθαι) are often attested in (Sahidic) Coptic documentary texts⁴⁵. It is possible that the problem cannot be resolved uniformly by deriving all the Coptic forms from either the Greek

⁴⁰ STEINDORFF, *Lehrbuch der koptischen Grammatik*, §284. The same view is held by A. BÖHLIG, *Die griechischen Lehnwörter im sahidischen und bohairischen Neuen Testament* (München, 1953). But see the review article of L.T. LEFORT in *Le Muséon* 67 (1954), 400-3. For a general discussion of the problem consult H. FÖRSTER (ed.), *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (Berlin/New York, 2002), xv-xxi.

⁴¹ For references see n. 39 above.

⁴² A. SHISHA-HALEVY, ‘A Definitive Sahidic Coptic Grammar’ [Review article of B. LAYTON, *A Coptic Grammar*], *Orientalia* 71 (2003), 457.

⁴³ REINTGES, *Coptic Egyptian*, 39.

⁴⁴ Ch. REINTGES, ‘Coptic Egyptian as a bilingual language variety’, in: P. BÁDENAS DE LA PEÑA *et al.* (eds.), *Lenguas en contacto: el testimonio escrito* (Madrid, 2005), §5.3. A more detailed, linguistically based analysis of the idea can be found in Ch. REINTGES, ‘Code-Mixing Strategies in Coptic Egyptian’, *Lingua Aegyptia* 9 (2001), 196-207.

⁴⁵ FÖRSTER (ed.), *Wörterbuch*, xviii. REINTGES (*Coptic Egyptian*, 39) also indicates that, occasionally, the full form of the Greek infinitival suffix -εσθαι is preserved in Coptic.

infinitive/imperative or an uninflected stem. What I would like to point out here is the fact that the supposed adoption of an imperative form is not entirely inconsistent. Provided that the periphrastic conjugations had already superseded all the *sdm.f* forms as early as the Pre-Coptic phase, it seems plausible to assume that one and the same verb form (traditionally the infinitive) occurred in every possible sentence position as later in Coptic. However, in the absence of real finite vs. non-finite opposition (an issue which I have discussed elsewhere⁴⁶), a verb in (Pre-)Coptic was most likely not perceived by speakers as a genuine *infinitive* but rather as a sort of basic (lexical) form of the verb which – in its most neutral occurrence (with no conjugation base or personal pronoun attached) – appeared sentence-initially, in its imperative use⁴⁷. Accordingly, it would not be so unnatural from a Coptic point of view to take the imperative as a basic form of the verb when borrowing new words from a foreign language.

⁴⁶ B. EGEDI, 'Reconsidering the Categorial Status of Coptic Suffix and Conjugation Base', in: K. ENDREFFY and A. GULYÁS (eds.), *Proceedings of the Fourth Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists*, *Studia Aegyptiaca* 18 (Budapest, 2007), 109-19.

⁴⁷ The Coptic "infinitive" is the usual form to express the imperative as well, except for ten irregular verbs, which have a special imperative form. These verbs are listed in LAYTON, *A Coptic Grammar*, §366.