

# **The Syntax of Nonverbal Sentences in Middle Egyptian**

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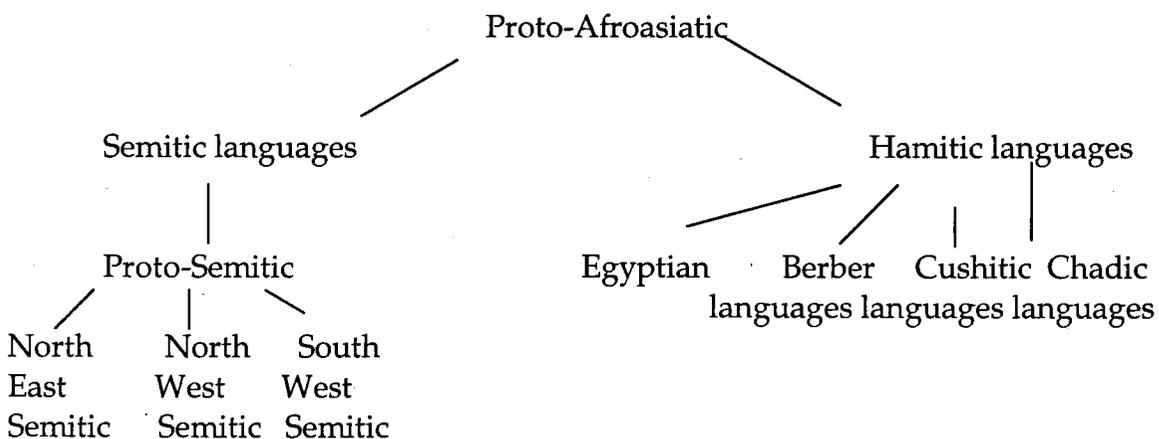
## 1.0 Introduction

The goal of this paper is to describe the syntactic distribution of the most simplistic clauses in Middle Egyptian. Through this exercise, one can provide a unified analysis of a cluster of syntactic constructions. In addition, with a theoretically informed analysis, the traditionally puzzling elements of nonverbal statements, such as the distribution of predicates and subjects as well as the identity of the element *pw* can be offered explications not available otherwise. Thus I show that Middle Egyptian is analyzable using a modern syntactic framework.

## 2.0 History of Egyptology

Egyptian is the original and ancient language of Egypt. It belongs to the Afro-Asiatic language family, and is related to both Semitic languages such as Arabic and Hebrew, and to Hamitic languages such as Berber and Cushitic.

Observe the family tree of Afro-Asiatic language family:



As this tree shows, Egyptian is a unique language within the family and occupies its own branch on the tree. Today, the language of Egypt is Arabic. Like Latin, Egyptian is a dead language, though it is spoken in the rituals of the Coptic (Egyptian Christian) Church.

For this reason, this language can only be studied in writing. The language first appeared in writing shortly before 3,000 B.C.E. and remained in active use until the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. This long life span makes it one of the longest continually utilized languages in the world. Also, because of this rich written tradition, there exists a wide range of materials that we can study. Throughout its long lifetime, Egyptian underwent tremendous changes. The language is typically classified into five major stages:

1. Old Egyptian is the oldest known phase of the language. This phase is dated from approximately 2800 B.C.E., when the first connected texts appeared. This phase of the language remained in use until about 2100 B.C.E.
2. Middle Egyptian is closely related to Old Egyptian, and it first appeared around 2100 B.C.E. and survived as a spoken language for about 500 years. However, this phase of the language remained the standard hieroglyphic language for the rest of ancient Egyptian

history. For this reason, most texts available today contain this language. This is also the phase of Egyptian that this paper examines.

3. Late Egyptian started to replace Middle Egyptian as the spoken language after 1600 B.C.E., and it remained in use until about 600 B.C.E. Though descended from Old and Middle Egyptian, this stage differed significantly from the earlier phases, particularly in grammar. This became a full written phase of the language around 1300 B.C.E.
4. Demotic is the next stage of Egyptian, and it not only refers to the spoken language, but also to a new written script.
5. Coptic is the last stage of Egyptian. Like Demotic, it refers to both a writing system as well as a stage of the Egyptian language. The last known texts written by native speakers of Coptic date to the eleventh century A.D. .

Study of Egyptian language began with an interest in its most ancient writing system—hieroglyphic. This script was used for the first three stages of the Egyptian language, and immediately after the knowledge of the script was lost, decipherment attempts began. Various allegorical methods were used to crack the script, but the real breakthrough came with the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799. There were three inscriptions of the same message on the Rosetta Stone in Greek, hieroglyphic, and Demotic. Luckily, there was a translation into a known language, Greek. A young French schoolteacher named Champollion

began to inspect the tablet's inscriptions phonetically by reviewing proper names in Greek and their transliterations into Egyptian. This convinced him that hieroglyphic was used alphabetically.

Later, Champollion discovered a name sign containing three characters. The first one reminded him of a sun, and he thought of the Coptic word, *re*, which was known as it was still spoken in the Coptic Church rituals. The third group of signs had phonetic value that he deduced from his comparisons of Greek names and their Egyptian transliterations; this is *s-s*. This gave him *re-ss*, immediately he was reminded, from Greek sources of Egyptian history, of the king Ramesses. Because the Coptic word for birth is *mise*, this both confirmed the phonetic reading of the word Ramesses, as well as the meaning of the name, which, according to history sources, is "the sun is the one who gives him birth."

This discovery proved two things about hieroglyphic: They were used both as phonograms and ideograms, and the language of hieroglyphic, or Middle Egyptian, is the earlier stage of the language of Coptic. Since his time, Egyptologists have continually refined our knowledge of ancient Egyptian, and work has been done extensively on Middle Egyptian grammar. Because Middle Egyptian is the most widely attested language in hieroglyphic texts, Egyptologists and linguists alike have worked to establish the syntax of the language of Middle Egyptian. Because Egyptological work is based on writings of a dead language, and the luxury of native speaker intuition is simply

unavailable, there still are speculative elements in our understanding of Egyptian grammar.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, because of Egyptologists' independent efforts, there exist many systems to transliterate and describe Egyptian texts. For instance, there are no less than four systems commonly used to transliterate hieroglyphic—the British, the Tübingen, the Budge, and the European system. Egyptologists routinely use numerous sets of symbols.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, Egyptology remains difficult to analyze and study linguistically.

### **3.0 Theories on Egyptian Grammar**

The first grammars of the Egyptian language were written in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, shortly after the hieroglyphs themselves were deciphered, and our understanding of Egyptian grammar has been evolving ever since. This section will give a brief sketch of the different theories of Egyptian grammar. Here I distinguish grammar from syntax, the latter is the topic of discussion in the next section. The focus of this section is on the more specific Egyptological concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the development of Egyptology, please consult Gardiner's *Egyptian Grammar, An Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*.

<sup>2</sup> I will use the European system in this paper because it requires the least number of special characters not available on a common keyboard.

### 3.1 Gardiner's Theory

The earliest approach to an understanding of Middle Egyptian not only relied heavily on Coptic, which as stated above, is an earlier stage of the language, but also on the assumption that Middle Egyptian was a Semitic language. There are, in fact, many features that Egyptian shares with Semitic languages. Historically, the verbal system of most Semitic languages has a primary aspectual distinction between two kinds of forms, often labeled as "perfective" and "imperfective." These labels were adopted for the Egyptological verbal system. Sir Alan Gardiner, who published a monumental study of Middle Egyptian grammar, remained a major proponent of the aspectual differences being the main differentiating factor in Middle Egyptian verbal system. Thus, Gardiner proposed the two different forms as the basis of Middle Egyptian verbs.

### 3.2 The "Standard" Theory

After many new discoveries were made of a major verbal form in the Middle Egyptian, the *sdm.f*, which consists of a verbal root plus a attached suffix pronoun, Egyptologists became uncomfortable with the idea that the primary function of these forms was simply to distinguish different kinds of meaning, because the discoveries of many verbal forms yielded no perceptible differences

in meaning. But their existence was an undeniable fact. In the 1970's, the work of Hans Jakob Polotsky, another influential Egyptologist, gained wide acceptance.

With respect to the verbal forms, Polotsky, in 1976, proposed other distinctions in addition to the "perfective" and "imperfective." His new distribution soon included circumstantial, prospective, nominal forms, etc. So much did his theory influence Egyptologists that it was later referred to as the "standard" theory.

### **3.3 Some Modern Observations**

The knowledge of Middle Egyptian grammar is continually being refined. Because of this, accounts of the modern verbal system, the main component of Egyptian grammar, are becoming more and more complex. An array of specialist terminology and jargon, and Egyptology-specific ways of describing came into being. Although they are quite useful in organizing Egyptological findings, they may make Egyptian seem unnatural, and the study of this language particularly difficult.

### **4.0 Basic Middle Egyptian Verbal Syntax**

There are two main types of sentences in Middle Egyptian, nonverbal and verbal. Because most theories attempting to provide an account of Egyptian

language deal with the Egyptian verbal system, it makes sense to discuss verbal statements in Egyptian first.

According to Egyptologists, Middle Egyptian has the basic word order of VSO. This means that Egyptian, like modern Irish, is a verb-initial language. The full word order of Middle Egyptian is VsdoSOA, which appears complex. This formulation requires an explanation. The lower case letters represent pronominal subjects (s), datives (d) and objects (o). In Egyptian, these must precede the nominal subjects (S), objects (O), and prepositional phrases and adverbs (A). The full order of Middle Egyptian is quite strict so that elements in verbal sentences must appear in the order described by VsdoSOA:

(1) rdjt      sw      r<sup>c</sup>.  
show(V) him(d) Re(S)  
Re showing himself.

(2) rdjt      mntw      t3wj      n      jtj.  
give(V) Montu (S) two-land(O) to sovereign(A)  
Montu's giving the two lands to the Sovereign.

Note that these so-called verbal sentences do not really translate into English as complete sentences. But in Egyptian, any clause containing a verbal form, in these two examples, the verb *rdjt*, is considered a verbal "sentence." Throughout this paper, I will use "sentence" and "clause" interchangeably to accommodate both linguists and Egyptologists. It is clear from these two examples that the word order in Egyptian is strictly preserved, and that the language is strictly verbal initial.

Although the subject is supposed to be in second position, but as stated in the full word order, VsdoSOA, a pronominal element can precede a nominal subject. This is the case in example (1). In fact, the tendency of pronouns to occupy a position close to the first prosodic word is quite common in Middle Egyptian. Enclitic pronouns occupy the second position in a sentence. When pronouns are not present, the regular VSO order is followed. Example (2) illustrates the normal VSO order.

VSO is also the word order of Arabic and some Celtic languages. Observe the following sentence in modern Irish (Doherty 1996: 3):

(3) D'ith Pól an t-úll.  
Ate(V) Paul(S) the-apple(O).  
Paul ate the apple.

The structure of the Irish sentence is quite similar to the structure of Egyptian verbal statements. The word order for Irish finite clauses is strictly VSO, and any other word orders are not tolerated (Doherty 1996: 3):

(4) \*Pól d'ith an t-úll.  
Paul(S) ate(V) the-apple(O).

But according to modern syntactic theory, VSO is a derived word order. Chung and McCloskey (1987: 216-234) provide a detailed body of evidence for the analysis of VSO word order as the reflex of verb-fronting to a functional head in the inflectional domain of the sentence. Since this analysis proposes that Irish is underlyingly SVO, it might be expected that subject-initial word order would

surface in some circumstances. This is the case in nonfinite clauses, which are strictly subject-initial in Irish:<sup>3</sup>

- (5) Ghuigh sé é a theacht slán.  
Pary.PAST he(NOM) him(ACC) come.INF safely  
He prayed he would come through safely.

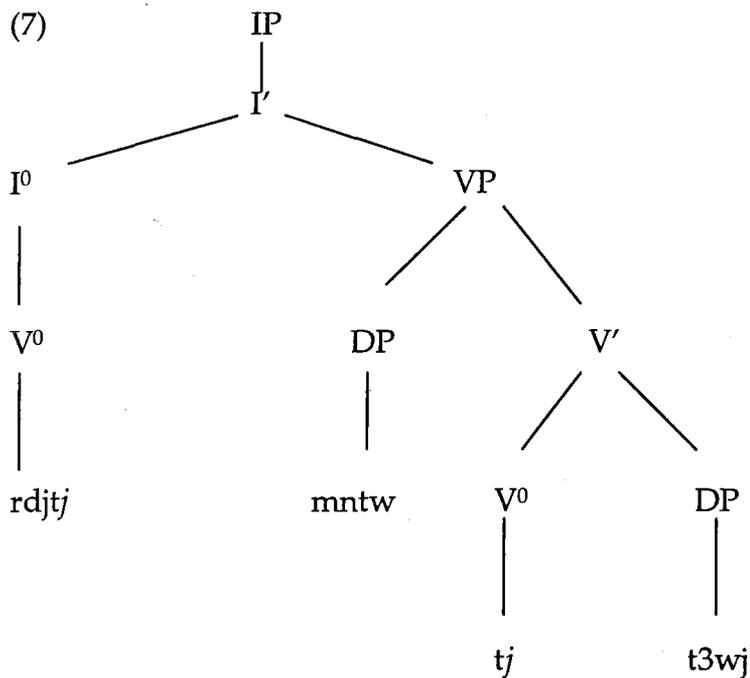
The subject-initial order is accounted for assuming that nonfinite inflection fails to induce verb movement in a complement clause. This situation is paralleled in other languages with raising of  $V^0$  to  $I^0$ , such as French, Welsh, and so on. Interestingly, it seems that this word order analysis is also paralleled in Middle Egyptian:

- (6) wd.n.j n.k jrt st.  
tell (V) I (s) to you (s) to do(V INF) it (O)  
I have commanded you to do it.

The embedded clause *n.k jrt st* quite clearly demonstrates a similar pattern. Egyptological studies do not distinguish between finite and nonfinite inflection, but this embedded clause resembles a non-finite inflection, thus verb movement is not induced. Therefore, the D-structure analysis of an Egyptian verbal statement would look like this:

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<sup>3</sup> Abbreviations are as follows: NOM: nominative; ACC: accusative; COP: copula; INF=infinite.



What should be striking about this analysis of Middle Egyptian is that the underlying clause structure of Middle Egyptian is like the structure of English, an SVO language. But in a sentence such as example (7), why does the subject *mntw* remain to the complement of  $I^0$  in Middle Egyptian but raise to the specifier of IP in English? There is a proposal for explaining the differences in word order between modern Irish and English, McCloskey (1991: 290-2) speculates that an explanation for the difference lies in distinct mechanisms of nominative Case assignment. Case can be assigned by either SPEC-HEAD agreement with AGR or by government from AGR. English is a language that allows only the former option, so the subject must raise to the specifier of IP. Irish, on the other hand, allows only the latter option, that is why it is strictly

in S-structure. This proposal may also provide an account for the S-structure characteristics of Middle Egyptian verbal statements.

Looking at the developmental trajectory of the Egyptian language, it is immensely interesting to trace the change in the word order of verbal formations. Linguistically, Middle Egyptian is characterized by a preference for synthetic grammatical structures. For example, Middle Egyptian displays a full set of morphological suffixes indicating gender and number, and exhibits no definite article, and maintains the VSO order in verbal statements.

Later Egyptian developed analytic features. For instance, suffixal markers of morphological oppositions tend to be dropped and functionally replaced by prefixal indicators such as the article. In fact, later varieties of Egyptian switched to a SVO word structure (Loprieno 1995: 91). Observe the Coptic sentence in (8):

(8) *ma-re pe=k - ran ouop.*  
Let-do your-name(S) be(V) - pure  
Your name be hallowed.

*Ma-re* resembles a verb, but it is in fact an exclamatory particle. Therefore, verbal clauses in Coptic Egyptian display SVO order. This is quite different from the Middle Egyptian equivalent, where verbal sentences are strictly verbal initial, as shown in (9):

(9) *w3b rn.k.*  
be purified(V) name.your(S)  
Your name be hallowed.

Overall, the sentential structure of verbal formations in Middle Egyptian is highly rigid, and the complex VsdoSOA formula used by traditional Egyptologists aptly describes the S-structure manifestations of Middle Egyptian verbal sentences. But the developmental path of the Egyptian language and evidence from other languages support the claim that Middle Egyptian is underlyingly SVO. The rest of the paper will examine in detail the other major classification of Middle Egyptian sentences, the nonverbal sentences. This is an Egyptological designation, and refers to sentences whose predicates contain no verbal forms.

### **5.0 Egyptological Generalizations of Nonverbal Sentences in Middle Egyptian:**

Egyptologists traditionally divide nonverbal sentences in Middle Egyptian into three categories. Each category displays a basic pattern and meaning.

First, adjectival sentences have the pattern Predicate-Subject, where the predicate is an adjective. These sentences express a quality of their subjects.

(10) nfr sw.  
good he  
He is good.

Second, nominal sentences have three basic patterns: AB, A *pw*, and A *pw* B, where either A or B can be the subject or predicate. They express the identity of their subjects. Because the element *pw* is orthographically identical to the masculine singular demonstrative, many Egyptologists treat *pw* as a

demonstrative pronoun. But in A *pw* sentences, *pw* is neutral, and can have a masculine singular, feminine singular, or plural referent. So in the case of a nominal sentence, Egyptologists describe *pw* as a copula used to denote identity as shown in (11):

- (11) z3.j pw.  
 son my pw  
 He is my son.

Sentence (11) has the pronoun *pw* referring to a masculine singular noun phrase. But depending on context, the A *pw* pattern can mean "He is A," "She is A," "They are A," "It is A," "This is A," "These are A," etc.

- (12) ḥmt wꜥb pw.  
 wife priest pw  
 She is a priest's wife.

- (13) ḥwrw pw.  
 miserable ones pw  
 They are miserable ones.

In the A B sentence pattern, either nominal elements can serve as the subject. To parse a nominal sentence of this format, one needs to rely heavily on the context in which the sentence appears. For instance, the following pair of sentences has identical structure, but given the proper context, can have different emphasis.<sup>4</sup>

- (14) **jnk** ḥq3.  
 I ruler  
 I am the ruler.

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<sup>4</sup> Whenever the distribution of subject and predicate is ambiguous, I will provide the subject in bold letters.

Sentence (14) answers the question “Who are you,” to which the reply would be “I am the ruler.” If the question is asking who the ruler is, the structure of the sentence would not change:

(15) jnk      ḥq3.  
I          ruler  
The ruler is I.

Egyptologists believe that such differences would be noticeable in actual speech where the intonation of these two propositions would differ. In writing however, such luxuries are not present. In a writing system as complex as hieroglyphic, which is a system that is phonetically opaque, such variations are not transparent. Like the Arabic script or the Hebrew script, vowels in Egyptian are missing. In addition, spelling and writing convention were very much non-standardized. All of these characteristics may have contributed to the potential ambiguities in writing.

The third nominal sentence pattern is the so-called A *pw* B pattern. As discussed above, Egyptologists have identified *pw* as a demonstrative pronoun, but in A *pw* B sentences, they generally treat *pw* as a copula. It seems unlikely that *pw* functions as both a demonstrative pronoun and a verbal copula. Therefore, I will offer some speculations about the true nature of the element *pw*. Again, in these sentences, either A or B can be the subject.

(16) jnk pw šw.  
 I pw Shu  
 Shu is I.

(17) mnw pw n z(j) nfrw.f.  
 monument pw of man goodness.his  
 The monument of a man is his goodness.

The above pair demonstrates that both elements A and B can be the subject. Also, sentence (17) offers an interesting insight into the placement of *pw*. It always occupies a sentence second position, even if it means splitting up a noun phrase. Of all the Egyptological documents thus far retrieved and preserved, this rule is invariably followed, and sentences such as (18) are not to be found:

(18) \*mnw n z(j) pw nfrw.f.  
 monument of man pw goodness.his  
 The monument of man is his goodness.

Finally, the adverbial sentences normally have the pattern Subject-Predicate, where the predicate is an adverb or prepositional phrase. In certain cases, the predicate may precede the subject. In Egyptology, the adverbial sentence category is one that is the most complex in structure, and may sometimes be conflated with verbal sentences. The basic pattern discussed here is purely for simple adverbial sentences without the presence of any verbal forms.

Sentence (19) is a typical simple adverbial sentence:

(19) m.k tw ʕ3.  
 Look you here  
 Look, you are here.

Sometimes, adverbial sentences can also express identity. This is done through a construction that uses location as a means to indirectly refer to identity. For example, when one says that he is “in a father” in Middle Egyptian, he is basically saying that he is a father. Middle Egyptian, or at least what has survived in writing, routinely uses this construction to denote identity:

(20) jw            jtj.j            m            wꜥw.  
particle        father my    in        soldier  
My father was a soldier.  
(literally, my father was in the role of a soldier.)

## **6.0 Syntax of Nominal and Adjectival Sentences :**

This paper will not employ the traditional classifications Egyptologists have devised, namely, treating nonverbal sentences as belonging to three major groups. I propose here that nominal and adjectival sentences are sufficiently similar to warrant their being grouped as one category. Before we begin to analyze these two types of sentences using modern syntactic theory, it is fruitful to have some background knowledge of Egyptian adjectives and pronouns.

### **6.1 Middle Egyptian Adjectives**

There are four basic forms of adjectives used in Middle Egyptian

writing—the masculine singular, the masculine plural, the masculine dual, and the feminine. When adjectives are used to modify nouns, they always follow the nouns, and agree in number and gender with the nouns which they modify.

(21) ḥmt nfrt  
woman good.FEM  
Good woman

(22) šḥtj nb  
peasant every  
Every peasant

(23) šḥtjw nbw  
peasant.PLU every.PLU  
All peasants

It is interesting to note that the feminine form lacks a plural counterpart, and that the dual form is rarely used in modifying nouns. There could be an explanation for this fact. The hieroglyphic writing system is not faithful in recording phonological differences pointing to different meanings. Thus, even if a feminine plural form existed, it may not be attested in the written language. Also, the masculine singular form is the unmarked form. So when adjectives are not used to modify nouns, but used to serve as the predicates of simple nonverbal sentences, the masculine singular, the unmarked form, is used with no exceptions and without regard to the number and gender of the subjects of predication.

Middle Egyptian adjectives can stand alone and behave like nouns. The only exception is the primary adjective *nb*, which means “every.” But when they do, they must carry suffixal elements to indicate gender and number.

## 6.2 Middle Egyptian Pronouns

Middle Egyptian has four sets of personal pronouns, which share many elements with the pronominal systems of other Afro-Asiatic languages (Loprieno 1995: 63).<sup>5</sup> The first set is the so-called suffix pronoun.<sup>6</sup> This group of pronouns is used to indicate the possessor in a direct genitival construction, as shown in (24):

(24) prw.j  
house my  
My house

The second group of pronouns is what Egyptologists call *dependent pronouns* (Allen 2000: 49). In fact, these are enclitic pronouns. They are used as objects of transitive verbal phrases, and as subjects of adjectival sentences. Their use in verbal sentences is not pertinent to this paper. One important trait of these enclitics is that they always occupy the position after the first prosodic unit of the clause, a “second-position” effect that is quite common in Middle Egyptian.

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<sup>5</sup> The fourth group is usually not identified by Egyptologists and is not pertinent to the scope of this paper, it is called the stative endings.

<sup>6</sup> This pronominal form can also be used as a prepositional complement or the subject of a verb.

The third group of pronouns is Egyptologically designated as *independent pronouns*. These are in fact stressed pronouns. They function as the topic of a nominal sentence in the first and second person.<sup>7</sup>

Another set of important elements is the demonstratives. Middle Egyptian has four sets of adjectival demonstratives. In these series, each of which conveys a different demonstrative meaning, morphemes consist of a pronominal base, followed by deictic indicator. Generally, the bases are *p* for masculine, *t* for feminine, *jp* and *jpt* for the plural patterns. The indicators are *n* for closeness, *f* for distance, *w* also for closeness, *3* for vocative reference. In Middle Egyptian, the *pw*-series was superseded by the *pn*-series in its function as a demonstrative. Because both sets essentially refer to the same ideas, it is natural that one gradually became the more widely used variety. Also, it is important to note that because *pw*'s function is taken by another series, it is credible that it assumes the function of a copula in Middle Egyptian nominal sentences. As such, it is quite similar to the enclitic pronouns in its syntax. It must also come as close to the first prosodic unit of the clause as possible.

### 6.3 A Syntactic Analysis of Nominal and Adjectival Sentences

At the core of a Middle Egyptian nominal sentence or adjectival sentence

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<sup>7</sup> Please refer to Appendix B for charts of Middle Egyptian pronouns.

is the predicate followed in bound constructions directly by a nominal subject as shown in (25)-(27):

(25) rmt pw.  
man pw  
He is a man.

(26) wrtj rn nj jtj.k.  
Wrtj name of father.your  
Your father's name is Wrtj.

(27) nfr sw.  
good he  
He is good.

This basic distribution is underlyingly the unmarked order of adjectival and nominal sentences. It generally corresponds to the regular adjectival sentences and simple A B sentences and A *pw* sentences in traditional Egyptology.

Note also that *pw* is an enclitic. Thus, it tends to move to the position after the first unit of the sentence, even if its movement breaks the surface unity of a phrasal constituent. The element *pw*'s affinity with the enclitic pronouns of Middle Egyptian can be used to explain the structure in (17) and also the following two examples:

(28) hw pw hn<sup>c</sup> sj3.  
Hu pw and Sia  
They are Hu and Sia.

(29) t3 pw nfr.  
Land pw good

It was a good land.

In example (28), the predicate of the sentence is the phrase *hw hn<sup>c</sup> sj3* and *pw* functions as "they." Because of *pw*'s syntactic function, it breaks up the surface unity of this phrasal predicate. Similarly, *t3 nfr* is the phrasal predicate of sentence (29), here its surface unity is also interrupted by *pw*.

When the subject of a nominal or adjective sentence, rather than the third person, is first or second person, then the stressed pronoun is used as opposed to the enclitic pronoun. According to Comrie (1988: 26-57), first and second person occupy a higher position than the third person on the hierarchy of salience, which means that this set of discourse referents are given more emphasis. Thus, the stressed pronouns are used to describe them. Syntactically, this series of pronouns requires a more topical initial position. Thus, in the first and second person, the nominal and adjectival sentence displays the pattern where subject precedes predicate as shown in (30) and (31):

(30) **jnk** *rmt*.  
I man  
I am a man.

(31) **jnk** *nfr*.  
I good  
I am good.

Recall that Egyptologists claim that A *pw* B and A B sentences are ambiguous in their subject-predicate distribution, and that the only way to distinguish the subject from its predicate is to use contextual information.

Sentence (30) demonstrates why no contextual information is needed. If we look at sentences (14) and (15), repeated here as (32a,b):

(32a) *jnk*    *ḥq3*.  
I       ruler  
I am the ruler.

(32b) *jnk*    *ḥq3*.  
I       ruler  
The ruler is I.

We see that the presence of the stressed pronoun *jnk* is enough to attest to the fact that it is the subject. Putting it in other contexts will not really change the syntactic distribution. What is important in these constructions is that stress and predication are two different issues. Thus, sentence (32a) and (32b) can only be analyzed as having the same typography as (32a), and (32b) is not a sound reading:

(32a) *jnk*    *ḥq3*.  
I    ruler  
I am the ruler.

Example (31) also contradicts traditional Egyptology's characterization of adjectival sentences, according to which adjectival sentences can only have the form Predicate-Subject. As mentioned earlier in this section, adjectival sentences and nominal sentences are quite similar in syntax, which is why they are analyzed as a single category. Since Egyptologists only recognize Predicate-Subject as the adjectival pattern, they have argued that the construction *jnk nfr*

("I good") is really a nominal sentence. They have argued that *nfr* in this case is no longer the adjective for "good," but its nominalized version meaning "good one." (Allen 2000: 77). Recall from section 5.2 that when adjectives modify nouns, they must assume the gender and number of the nouns they modify. Also, they may stand alone and behave like nouns. Likewise, when they do stand alone, they must carry gender and number. In constructions such as *jnk nfr* ("I good"), however, the feminine form of *nfr* is never used. So it does not seem likely that it is a nominalized version of the adjective denoting "good one." In fact, its property is quite similar to the property of an adjectival predicate, which does not carry gender or number. Therefore, adjectival sentences can also demonstrate the Subject-Predicate structure, and its distribution is identical to that of nominal sentences'. This lends further evidence to the fact that adjectival sentences and nominal sentences should be analyzed together.

In the nominal and adjectival patterns discussed so far, the distribution of subject and predicate is retrievable on syntactic and to a certain extent, semantic, grounds. The subjects of these nominal and adjectival sentences are usually more determined and semantically more specific than the features predicated of them. In other words, the predicate does not exhaustively characterize the subject. Thus, these sentences can be referred to as having a classifying or qualifying predicate.

(33) ḥt.j pw.  
 property my pw  
 It is my property.

Sentence (33) demonstrates the underlying predicate-subject structure of classifying nominal and adjectival sentences of Middle Egyptian. This identical pattern is used for the following set of sentences where the enclitic *pw* is used invariably as the subject of the clause.

(34) ḥn pw.  
 attack pw  
 It is an attack.

(35) ḥmwtjw pw.  
 craftsmen pw  
 They are craftsmen.

(36) ḥf 3w pw.  
 snake pw  
 It is a snake.

(37) grḥ pw.  
 end pw  
 It is the end.

(38) sḥtj pw n sḥt-ḥm3t.  
 Peasant pw in Wadi Natrun  
 He is a peasant of the Wadi Natrun.

The classifying pattern is preserved for those with adjectival complements when the element *pw* does not occur:

(39) nfr ḥmt tn.  
 beautiful woman this  
 This woman is beautiful.

(40) nfrwj                      nn.  
       beautiful-dual    this  
       How beautiful this is!

It is worthwhile to note that the dual form is used in sentence (40). This is, however, not used to have agreement in number. It is used, instead, to denote exclamation. Literally, sentence (40) can be translated as “doubly-beautiful this.” This pair of adjectival sentences follow the same pattern as the nominal sentences above, namely, predicate-subject.

Thus, the classifying or qualifying patterns have a generalized preference for third person subjects to follow the predicate, and for first and second person subjects to precede the predicate. According to Loprieno (1995: 103), this is the unmarked order for nominal and adjectival statements.

However, sometimes the nominal and adjectival constructions favor an underlying subject-predicate distribution. This happens when the subject and predicate are coextensive—rather than classifying or describing the semantic sphere of the subject, the predicate specifies it. In other words, it exhaustively characterizes the subject.

Observe the following sentences:

(41) mkt.t                      mkt r<sup>c</sup>.  
       protection.your    protection Re  
       Your protection is Re’s protection.

(42) pr.f                      pr.jtj.  
       house.his    house.father  
       His house is the father’s house.

Sentences (41) and (42) contain coextensive subjects and predicates. The predicate in (41), *mkt r*, merely specifies the subject instead of assigning it a class. Compare this to (39) and (40), where the predicate, *nfr*, is used to qualify or classify the subjects. In other words, the predicate and subject are not from the same class. Similarly, (42) exhibits the same relationship between the subject and predicate, and as the bold letters demonstrate, the subjects precede the predicates.

This characterization clarifies the traditional Egyptological descriptions, where Egyptologists state that A B and A *pw* B patterns can allow the subject or predicate to appear at either end. This specifying pattern is also used in adjectival statements as shown in (43):

(43) ntf      ḥzj      wj.  
          He      one praise me  
          He is one who praised me.

The adjectival phrase predicate of the subject *ntf* follows it in this specifying pattern because the subject and the predicate are coextensive. Note that because the subject, if it is a pronoun, precedes the predicate and appears at the topical initial position, it must appear in the form of a stressed pronoun as in (44):

(44) ntf      ḥrw.  
          He      Ḥorus  
          He is Horus.

Example (44) is another nominal version of the specifying order. Again, the pronominal subject is in the stressed form, wholly consistent with the topical initial position accorded to pronouns of this form.

Therefore, the classification of nominal and adjectival sentences in Egyptological literature can be re-analyzed as essentially one syntactic category. By appealing to semantics, the nominal and adjectival clauses in Middle Egyptian can be divided into the marked order, with an underlying preference for Subject-Predicate distribution, and an unmarked, having an underlying preference for Predicate-Subject distribution. Egyptological analyses where adjectival and nominal sentences appear as two distinct types are not necessary and may, in fact, be misleading sometimes.

#### 6.4 The Distribution of *pw*

One difficult issue with the analysis of nominal and adjectival sentence type is the nature of the element *pw*. This has also been a puzzle to Egyptologists. Sometimes it appears as a demonstrative as in (45) and (46):

(45) *wsjr pw.*  
Osiris this  
This is Osiris.

(46) *zj pw.*  
Man this  
He is a man.

Sometimes, *pw* appears as a copula type element in a linking structure as in (47) and (48):

(47) *dmj pw jmnt.*  
harbor *pw* West  
The West is harbor.

(48) *jnk pw mdw.*  
I *pw* speaker  
The speaker is me.

Note, however, that the syntactic distribution of these two sentences (which, incidentally, are classifying sentences, the unmarked order) conforms to the syntactic distribution described above. In other words, the presence of *pw* did not change anything of syntactic significance. Similarly, a specifying sentence follows the Subject-Predicate pattern as in (49) and (50):

(49) *j<sup>c</sup>wtj. k pw stš.*  
Interpreter.your *pw* Seth  
Your interpreter is Seth.

(50) *zh3.k pw hrw.*  
Scribe.your *pw* Horus  
Your scribe is Horus.

In these instances, *pw* does not seem to add or subtract any meaning to the sentences at all. However, there are several reasons that believe that *pw* is indeed a demonstrative.

Semantically, the demonstrative *pw* refers to a masculine form that denotes closeness. It is regularly translated into English as “this.” Sentences such as (51) attests to *pw*’s ability to be exploited as a demonstrative.

- (51) *zh3w pw.*  
Scribe this  
He (this) is a scribe.

If *pw* is indeed a demonstrative, then our analysis detailed above needs to be adjusted. The unmarked order and marked order of nominal sentences must be interpreted differently as *pw* becomes semantically significant.

First looking at unmarked sentences, where the underlying order is Predicate-Subject. If *pw* is semantically significant, then there should be a difference in meaning between the following two propositions:

- (52) *z3.k pw anj.*  
Son.your this Ani  
He, Ani, is your son.

- (53) *z3.k anj.*  
Son.your Ani  
Ani is your son.

If *pw* is semantically empty, (52) and (53) should be almost identical in distribution, with *anj* appearing as the subject. If we consider *pw* to be a demonstrative, then (52) becomes a cleft sentence essentially meaning “It is Ani who is your son.” Thus, the emphasis for (52) and (53) becomes quite distinct.

This same rule can be applied to marked sentences. Sentence (50) and sentence (54) will be distinct in meaning in that (50) will have a cleft reading.

(54)  $zh3w.k$      $hrw.$   
Scribe.your Horus  
Your scribe is Horus.

The appearance of *pw* in (50) will no longer make it a marked type. In other words, since *pw* is explicitly the subject of that clause, it becomes a classifying sentence meaning "It is Horus who is your scribe," ascribing certain characteristics to the pronoun *pw*.

We can accommodate *pw* being a pronoun instead of a copula element without further damage to the current line of analysis. In addition, there is another reason to believe that *pw* is indeed a demonstrative. Recall that enclitic pronouns always occupy the position after the first prosodic unit of the sentence. Since *pw* the demonstrative would behave quite similarly, it appears to be occupying the second position in sentences as well, even if a phrase is interrupted by its emergence:

(55)  $w3w$      $pw$      $n$      $w3d-wr.$   
Wave    this    in bluegreen-great  
This is the wave of the sea.

(56)  $bw$      $pw$      $wr$      $n$      $jw$      $pn.$   
Product particle    main in island this  
This is the main product is on this island.

However, just as there are reasons to support the analysis of *pw* as a demonstrative, there are even more reasons to doubt this particular account of *pw*. First, recall from the previous discussion that in Middle Egyptian, there exists another demonstrative pronoun that is essentially identical in semantic value as *pw*. This means that there is no semantic motivation for *pw* to retain its deictic force. In fact, its counterpart, *pn*, which is also translated as “this” is much more widely used as a demonstrative than *pw* is (Allen 2000: 52).

Also, *pw* as a demonstrative is a masculine singular element, but when used in nominal sentences, *pw* is used as a subject for predicates with different gender and number and therefore appear not to agree with the nominal element it modifies.

Furthermore, though syntactically it occupies a position quite similar to a position an enclitic would occupy, it does not necessarily add any semantic value to a sentence. Thus, it is conceivable that *pw* is merely a functional element in Middle Egyptian.

If we assume that *pw* is a functional element, then our previous analysis regarding marked and unmarked order would remain completely intact. However, we do need to change one thing about our understanding of sentences of the A *pw* structure. If *pw* is just a copula like element, then sentences such as *rmt pw* in example (25), though still following the Predicate-Subject paradigm, would be regarded as null subject sentences.

Negation of nominal sentences lends further support to the claim that *pw* is merely a functional element lacking semantic value. Normally, nominal sentences are negated by two words in Middle Egyptian. The particle *nj* and the particle *js*. These two elements enclose the first prosodic unit of a sentence. For example:

(57) *nj ntk js zj.*  
*Nj you js man*  
 You are not a man.  
 (literally, it is not the case that you are a man)

(58) *nj wsh js pw.*  
*Nj broad one js pw*  
 It was not a broad one.  
 (literally, it is "not a broad one")

(59) *nj wr js pw wr jm.*  
*Nj great one js pw great one there*  
 The great one there is not a great one.  
 (literally, it is not the case that the great one there is a great one)

But the *pw* of these negations may be omitted altogether without altering the meaning of the sentence at all (Allen: 1999, 121). For instance:

(60) *z3.j pw.*  
*Son.my pw*  
 He is my son.

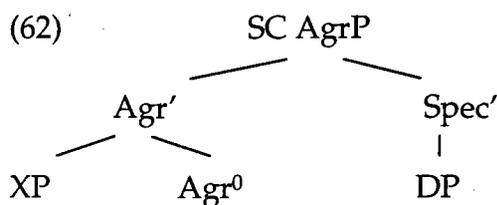
(61) *nj z3.j js.*  
*Nj son.my js*  
 He is not my son.

If *pw* were a demonstrative, its omission would yield a null-subject after all. If such null-subject negated sentences are allowed, then it makes sense that

null-subject statements are allowed by treating *pw* as a functional element. Thus, it seems most likely that the word *pw* is a functional element serving the role of a copula.

### 6.5 Syntactic Structure of Nominal and Adjectival Sentences

Therefore, the structure of the adjectival and nominal sentences in Middle Egyptian can be generalized in the following ways. Note that adjectival and nominal "sentences" in Egyptian, like Egyptian "verbal sentences," may not be sentences at all. Nonetheless, they are used in Egyptological literature. For the unmarked order, we can give the structure in (62), the structure of a small clause.



This structure captures the types of sentences that belong to the classifying and qualifying categories (the unmarked order).<sup>8</sup> Agr<sup>0</sup> may be the functional element *pw*, or it may be omitted altogether. For the marked order of nominal and adjective syntax, the subject DP and predicate XP switch places.

### 6.6 Concluding Remarks

Thus, it is possible to give a unified analysis of adjectival sentences and

<sup>8</sup> SC=Small Clause; AgrP=Agreement Phrase; DP=Determiner Phrase; XP=Any Constituent Phrase

nominal sentence as one category as opposed to the traditional classification.

This way, many ambiguities present in a traditional analysis can be disambiguated. In traditional Egyptology, the distribution of subject and predicate for A B or A *pw* B sentences is dependent upon context, and the role of *pw* is vaguely characterized. In addition, the existence of Subject-Predicate adjectival sentences causes further problems to the categorization of adjectival clauses as strictly Predicate-Subject.

Instead of dividing nominal and adjectival sentences into the traditional categories, they can be classified into two main groups. The first is the unmarked group, where the predicate serves a classifying function. This group prefers a Predicate-Subject order for third person subjects, and a Subject-Predicate order for first and second person subjects. The second is the marked group, where the predicate serves a specifying function. This group prefers a Subject-Predicate order. By appealing to semantics, the traditional ambiguities regarding subject-predicate distribution can be eliminated.

Furthermore, I show that *pw* is indeed a functional element serving the role of a copula. This clarifies the dual role played by *pw* in traditional Egyptology.

## 7.0 Syntax of Adverbial Sentences:

Simple adverbial sentences are quite regular and easy to analyze.<sup>9</sup> In this syntactic type, a nominal or pronominal subject, which can be bare or preceded by a particle, is followed by an adverbial phrase. This adverbial phrase expresses location mostly as in (63) and (64):

(63) sh3.y.j            m        ʕ.  
memory of me in palace  
The memory of me is in the palace.

(64) m.k                wj     r    gs.k.  
Behold-particle I at side.your  
Here I am at your side.

Sentences (63) and (64) are representative of the order of simple adverbial statements in Middle Egyptian. These two only differ by the appearance of a clause-initial particle, *m.k*.

Adverbial sentences can express identity. Usually this is done by using the adverbial phrase *m X*, which translates as “in the role of X.” This function of the adverbial sentences is so common that many Middle Egyptian texts regularly use this construction to denote identity (Allen 2000: 112). Observe (65) and (66):

(65) m.k                tw        m        mnjw.  
Behold-particle you in herdsman  
You are a herdsman.

(66) jw.k                m        z3.j.  
particle.you in son.my

---

<sup>9</sup> The pattern for adverbial sentences is usually used to include constructions such as the pseudoverbal sentences. Such inclusion makes analysis of this nonverbal type much more difficult. Thus, in the analysis that follows, only simple adverbial sentences are examined.

You are my son.

As in (66), the particle *jw* is regularly used to initiate adverbial sentence, and unlike the other adverbial sentence particle, *m.k*, it takes the pronominal suffix as its subject. Recall that the enclitic pronoun always occupies sentence-second position, this fact is visible in sentences (64) and (65) where the pronominal subjects following the particle are all enclitics.

Another use of adverbial sentences is to express possession as shown in

(67):

(67) m.k                      sw                      hr                      kmt.  
Behold-particle    He                      under                      Egypt  
He has Egypt.

Literally, this means "He is under the land of Egypt." This construction is invariably used to express possession. Again, the subject's pronominal form is an enclitic form.

In addition, adverbial sentences may appear without a subject when the subject is clear from context or when it does not refer to anything in particular:

(68) jw                      mj                      shr                      ntr.  
Particle                      like                      plan                      god  
It is like the plan of a god.

(69) nn                      m                      jwms.  
Not                      in exaggeration  
It is not an equivocation.

This fact is important for another reason. As discussed earlier, one of the motivations for concluding that *pw* is a copula rather than a demonstrative is the

fact that Middle Egyptian sentences can take null subjects. The existence of null-subject sentences such as (68) and (69) lends further support to that analysis.

It is evident from the discussion thus far, that simple adverbial sentences can express location, possession, and identity. Invariably, the syntactic form is subject-predicate, and any pronominal subject must be either suffixal or enclitic.

### 8.0 Stage vs. Individual Level Predication:

This section shows that Middle Egyptian nonverbal sentences may denote either permanent or temporary properties, and there is no syntactic difference between the two. In modern Irish, only nominal predicates are productive in its copular sentences. These consistently denote a permanent property as shown in (70) and (71):

(70) Is mac léinn é.  
COP student him (ACC)  
He is a student.

(71) Is teach galánta é seo.  
COP house nice this  
This is a nice house. (Doherty 1996: 37)

In addition, all adjectival predicates that may appear in copular sentences express a permanent property: *aisteach* "odd"; *beag* "small":

(72) Is aisteach agus is iontach bealaigh Dé.  
COP strange and COP wonderful ways God (GEN)  
God's ways are strange and wonderful.

(73) Is greannmhar thú.  
 COP funny you (ACC)  
 You are funny. (Doherty 1996: 37)

In Irish, the use of adjectival predicates is not productive; many adjectives expressive of a permanent state or property cannot appear in copular sentences.

The substantive verb *be* is used in these cases:

(74) \*Is cliste é.  
 COP clever him (ACC)  
 He is clever.

(75) Tá sé cliste.  
 Be he (NOM) clever  
 He is clever. (Doherty 1996: 37-8)

In modern Irish, the set of prepositions which may appear in copular sentences is even more limited as shown in (76) and (77):

(76) Is as Inis Eoghain é.  
 COP from Inishowen him (ACC)  
 He is from Inishowen.

(77) Is le Máire an carr sin.  
 COP with Maire the car that  
 That car is Maire's. (Doherty 1996: 38)

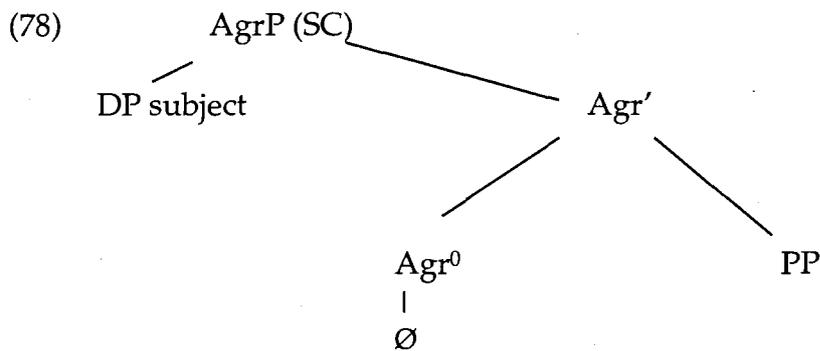
In Irish there is a syntactic distinction between *temporary* and *permanent* properties. Those of the former category are expressed as copular sentences whereas those of the latter group are expressed as statements containing the substantive verb.

This traditional distinction between semantic properties finds an obvious parallel in the distinction between *individual-level* and *stage-level* predicates

(Doherty 1996: 40). *Individuals* are objects or natural kinds and *stages* are spatio-temporal parts of these individuals. Therefore, a stage-level predicate is one which expresses a property holding of stages of individuals, while an individual-level predicate is one expressing a property which holds for all the stages of an individual.

It is also postulated that subjects of individual-level predicates are realized in the specifier of IP, while the subjects of stage-level predicates are realized internal to the complement of I<sup>0</sup>. Recall that in the syntactic structure of (7), the verbal predicate is realized internal to the complement to I<sup>0</sup>. Also, the copula *pw* is sometimes omitted from nominal predications, and when it is used, it invariably appears in nominal sentences. Of course, nominal sentences always contain individual-level predicates. In unmarked Middle Egyptian nominal and adjectival sentences, the specifier of the AgrP (SC) is where the subject resides.

Is this syntactic difference between verbal and nonverbal sentences the same as that between sentences containing stage-level and individual-level predication? It is important to look at the syntax of nonverbal statements in Middle Egyptian that contain stage-level predicates to see if there are syntactic differences. If one takes a look at sentence (63), its structure is given as:



The only syntactic difference between (78) and the nominal sentences is the clear absence of any element occupying  $\text{Agr}^0$  here. In sentences with nominal predication, the copula *pw* is many times optional. Thus, in Middle Egyptian nonverbal sentences, although we can generalize that all copular sentences have individual-level predication, there is no underlying syntactic distinction between individual-level and stage-level predication as there is in modern Irish, where the syntax of copular sentences and sentences employing the substantive verb are quite disparate.

### 9.0 Conclusion:

Egyptology has been an area that has fascinated scholars for centuries. However, the gradual accumulation of specialist jargon and other unsystematic description make the structures of the language quite difficult to access. Therefore, equipped with the tools of modern syntactic theory, it is fruitful to re-examine the Egyptological evidence gathered.

This paper's primary task is to give a theoretical description of the nonverbal sentences in Middle Egyptian. The phrase "nonverbal sentence" is not a syntactic terminology, but an Egyptological one.

If we accept that Middle Egyptian is a natural language, then we can examine its structure in the light of modern syntactic theory. Traditionally, its nonverbal sentences are subdivided into three categories, each containing characterizations which are sometimes vague. I propose that we examine Middle Egyptian nonverbal sentences as belonging to two categories, nominal/adjectival and simple adverbial. The former contains the unmarked order of Predicate-Subject for third person subjects and Subject-Predicate for first person subjects. It also contains the marked order of Subject-Predicate. Sometimes the functional element *pw* is used as a copula connecting the predicate and subject. The latter category invariably has the order Subject-Predicate and can express location, possession, and identity.

By appealing to modern syntax and semantics to "redistribute" nonverbal sentences, many problems are solved. This analysis makes subject-predicate distribution clearly visible in certain nominal sentences even without contextual information. It also firmly establishes the functional nature of the element *pw*. It justifies the existence of Subject-Predicate adjectival sentences, and it extricates simple adverbial sentences from its more complex counterparts.

In addition, a theoretically informed review of Egyptian evidence establishes relationships of Egyptian with other languages. Its VSO word order resembles the word order of Irish and other Celtic languages, and the "second-position" effects of its enclitic pronouns makes it similar to many other languages including Hittite. However, it is also distinct from languages such as modern Irish that syntactically differentiate stage and individual-level predication.

Thus, through this re-examination, the Middle Egyptian can be given a new treatment. Firstly, it appeals to universal syntactic concepts. Secondly, it relies solely upon standard terminology. The success of fitting such simple sentences into modern syntax is an important first step in demystifying the syntactic structure of this challenging but wonderfully rich language.

## Appendix A

### Additional nominal/adjectival sentences:

Sentences (79) to (84) exhibit the unmarked order of nominal/adjectival sentences. They contain a classifying predicate, and prefer the Predicate-Subject order for third person subjects and the Subject-Predicate order for first and second person subjects.

(79) p<sub>h</sub>rt pw ɛnh.  
cycle particle life  
Life is a cycle.

(80) jnk w<sub>h</sub>mw jqr.  
I herald excellent  
I am an excellent herald.

(81) dpt mwt nn.  
taste death this  
This is the taste of death.

(82) mrt rn.s.  
Meret name.her  
Her name is Meret

(83) jntk r<sup>c</sup> nb pt.  
You Re lord sky  
You are Re, Lord of the sky.

(84) nfr sn  
good they  
They are good.

Sentences (85) and (86) exhibit the marked order of nominal/adjectival sentences. They contain a specifying predicate, and prefer the Subject-Predicate order.

(85) t<sub>w</sub>t jtj.j jnk z3.k.  
you father.my I son.your  
You are my father and I am your son.

(86) nts r<sup>c</sup>w.  
She Re  
She is Re.

**Additional adverbial sentences:**

The following sentences exhibit the Subject-Predicate order of simple adverbial sentences. The following adverbial predicates used to indicate identity and location.

(87) nn wh<sub>3</sub> m hrj-jb.sn.  
not fool in midst.their  
The fool was not in their midst.

(88) m.tn špswt hr sdw.  
Behold noblewomen on rafts  
The noblewomen are on rafts.

(89) nḥmn wj mj k<sub>3</sub>.  
Surely I like bull  
I'm really like a bull.

(90) s<sub>3</sub> c m nb c.  
Broken arm in lord arm  
The broken-of-arm is the lord-of arm.

## Appendix B

### Middle Egyptian Pronouns

Independent/stressed pronouns:

jnk	First person singular
(j)ntk, <u>t</u> wt	Second person masculine singular
(j)nt <u>t</u> , <u>t</u> wt	Second person feminine singular
(j)ntf, swt	Third person masculine singular
(j)nts, swt	Third person feminine singular
(j)nn	First person plural
(j)nt $\bar{t}$ n	Second person plural
(j)ntsn	Third person plural

Dependent/enclitic pronouns:

wj	First person singular
<u>t</u> w, tw	Second person masculine singular
<u>t</u> n, tn	Second person feminine singular
sw	Third person masculine singular
sj, st	Third person feminine singular
n	First person plural
<u>t</u> n, tn	Second person plural
sn, st	Third person plural

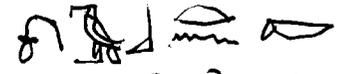
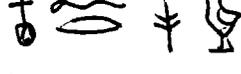
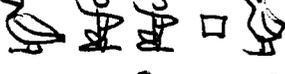
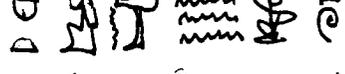
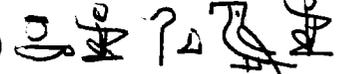
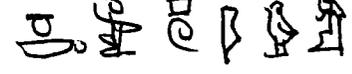
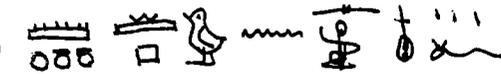
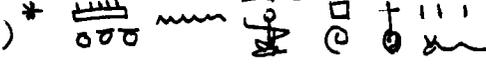
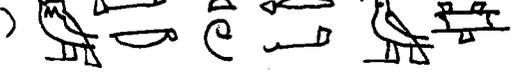
Suffixal pronouns:

.j	First person singular
.k	Second person masculine singular
. <u>t</u> , .t	Second person feminine singular
.f	Third person masculine singular
.s	Third person feminine singular
.n	First person plural
. <u>t</u> n, .tn	Second person plural
.sn	Third person plural

## Appendix C

### Hieroglyphic Transcription:

I will provide the hieroglyphic transcription of the example sentences used in this paper. When the sources of these sentences are known, they are indicated next to the transcription in parenthesis.

- (1) 
- (2) 
- (6) 
- (9) 
- (10) 
- (11) 
- (12) 
- (13) 
- (14) 
- (15) Same as above
- (16) 
- (17) 
- (18) \* 
- (19) 
- (20) 

( Sinuhe B 77 )

(21)

(22)

(23)

(24)

(25)

(26)

(Pyr. 1434 b)

(27)

(28)

(29)

(Sinuhe B 81)

(30)

(31)

(32a, b) same as (14)

(33)

(34)

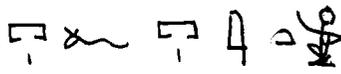
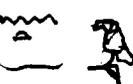
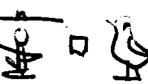
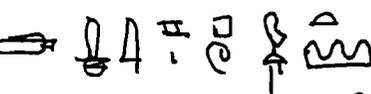
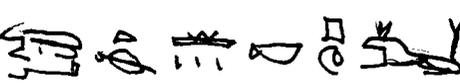
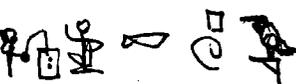
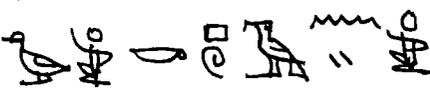
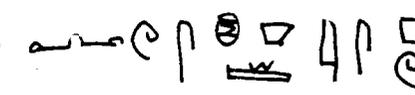
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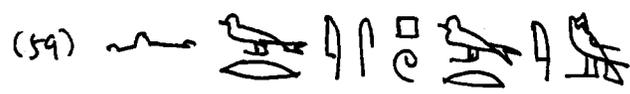
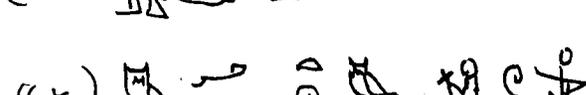
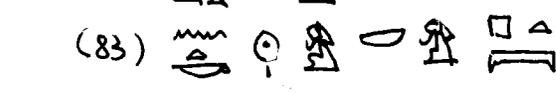
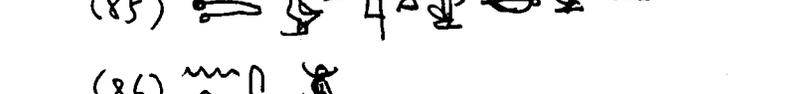
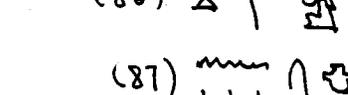
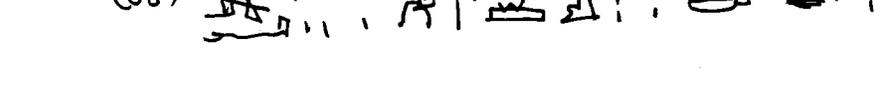
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