

Differential argument marking in Coptic

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Introduction

Coptic: some basics

- Coptic (Afro-Asiatic) is the final stage of the Ancient Egyptian language. Egyptian is the language of the longest attested history: from ca. 3000 BC till ca. AD 1100. However, as it has come down to us in the form of written sources of a considerable degree of formalization and standardization, the course of language change is not recorded and can only be hypothetically reconstructed.
- Coptic is attested in written sources from Egypt (and to some extent also from northern Nubia) since the mid-third century AD till the eleventh century, when it was superseded by Arabic. Coptic is still used as the liturgical language of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt.
- As Egypt in Late Antiquity was a multilingual country with Greek enjoying the status of the principal literary and administrative language, Coptic texts were written by means of a slightly adapted version of the Greek alphabet, adhered to Greek rhetorical strategies and contained a considerable amount of lexical borrowings from Greek (see Zakrzewska 2017a, among others).
- Coptic is actually a set of varieties, some of the clearly regional, others probably social. The two main literary varieties of Coptic are Sahidic and Bohairic. This presentation is based on my original research of a single corpus of Bohairic narrative texts, the *Martyrs Acts*, ed. by H. Hyvernats (1886/1977) and is intended as a synthesis of my earlier research on the linguistics of Bohairic narrative.

For basic linguistic information on Coptic, see Layton (2011), Loprieno & Müller (2012), Reintges (2018), Müller (2021).

Formulating the problem

This presentation deals with the marking strategies of the main nominal constituents in a Coptic verbal sentence:

Table 1.

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1 st argument | Actor | ‘subject’ |
| 2 nd argument | Undergoer | ‘direct object’ |
| 3 rd argument | Recipient | ‘indirect object’ |

Some of these marking strategies in Coptic differ significantly from those in pre-Coptic Egyptian. Moreover, these strategies display interesting typological peculiarities. How can we describe and explain these differences and peculiarities?

Suggested explanations

1. A shift from morphosyntactic to representational alignment

A possible structural explanation of the peculiarities of Coptic is the loss of the canonical passive and the consequent **shift from morphosyntactic to representational alignment**, specifically to a subtype of representational alignment sensitive to the **semantic functions** of the categories involved. Alignment is defined as is “the way in which (...) pragmatic and semantic units map onto syntactic ones” (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 316-317; 319-321). Synchronic variation of the marking strategies observed in Coptic reflects diachronic **competition between two subsystems of transitivity**, one of which is recessive and the other one productive.

2. Language contact with Greek

There exists some evidence that Egyptian notaries who drew up documents in Greek were struggling with the nominal categories of case and gender (Vierros 2012: 139-176). The question arises whether the development of new marking strategies in Coptic could have been triggered by language contact with Greek.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Description

Differential Subject Marking: head marking vs. double marking, information structure and accessibility (Zakrzewska 2006).

Table 2.

| Head marking ('inherited' from the earlier Egyptian) | Double marking (innovation of Coptic) |
|---|---|
| The intraverbal position: TAM-morpheme in the nominal or pronominal state + NP or pers. clitic (in complementary distribution) + verbal stem | The postverbal position: dedicated preposition <i>nče</i> + NP (dependent marking) cross-referenced on the TAM-morpheme by a third person clitic |

(1)

ouoh *xen* *ti-ounou* *a* *ne=f-hbōs*
PART PREP SDEF.F.SG-hour PERF1 POSS:PL=3SG.M-clothes

forfer *ebol* *mmo=f*
fall out ACC=3SG.M

‘At this moment his clothes (scil. his grave-clothes) fell down from him’ (AM, 55).

(2)

ouoh *a=* *er-keleuin* *nče* *pi-anomos*
PART PERF1=3SG.M- do/CONS-order NOM SDEF.M.SG-lawless

nse-hit=f *e-pi-šteko*
CONJ.3.PL-throw=3SG.M ALL-SDEF.M.SG-prison

‘And the lawless one ordered to throw him in prison’ (AM, 63)

An analysis in terms of **continuity and persistence of the particular subject types** (Zakrzewska 2006, after Givón 1983) reveals that the intraverbal nominal subjects are used for entities that are relevant for a very short text span who thus do not play any important role in the story. Such entities can be characterized as non-topical. This conclusion is further corroborated by an analysis in terms of the **protagonisthood and individuation** (after Kibrik 2011): the intraverbal nominal subjects are typically used for entities of inherently low topic worthiness: inanimate entities, collective participants and bystanders. In contrast, the main characters are typically indicated by postverbal nominal subjects.

Typological peculiarities

- Dependent marking of the postverbal Actor by the use of the dedicated preposition *nče*. This phenomenon calls for explanation, all the more as Coptic does not fit the model known from languages with the so-called marked nominatives (König 2008: 138-203, Handschuh 2014).
- The Actor expression marked with *nče* obligatorily follows the Undergoer and competes with certain modifiers for the final position in the clause. This order has been traditionally classified as VOS, a rarely attested type of basic word order pattern. As already observed by S. Dik (1997: vol. 1; 418), languages with the so-called OS dominant order lack canonical passive.

Differential Object Marking: head marking vs. dependent marking, information structure, telicity and affectedness vs. agency (Zakrzewska 2017b)

Table 3.

| | |
|---|---|
| Head marking ('inherited' from the earlier Egyptian) | Dependent marking (marginally attested in earlier stages of Egyptian, the prepositional strategy became dominant in Coptic). |
| V in the nominal or pronominal state + NP or a personal clitic | Marking by means of a preposition, e.g. <i>n-/mmo=</i> or another preposition |

(3)

a-u-erbasanizin mmo=f *a-u-hit=f* *e-pi-šteko*
 PERF1=3PL-torture ACC=3SG.M PERF1=3.PL-throw=3SG.M DIR-DEF.M-prison
 'They tortured him and threw him into the prison' (AM, 287, modified).

DOM (head marking vis-à-vis *n-/mmo=*): there is a striking asymmetry between pronominal vis-à-vis nominal realizations of the head marked Undergoers

Pronominal realizations

(4)

Focus → Topic

'When he_i (Diocletian) learned the content (of the sermon), he_i gnashed his teeth against Saint Peter_j and he_i wanted to kill him_j. For this reason, when the tribunes informed him_i about him_j that they had arrested him_j, he_i rejoiced and sent (an order) to decapitate him_j. After the quick arrival of the dispatch, the tribunes were eager to accomplish the thing.

But when they went to take him_j out of prison in order to fulfill the emperor's order, the people sat down next to the entrance of the prison to guard their shepherd_j, for they were saying: "Let them kill us first and then seize him_j." The tribunes were deliberating how they could take him_j out without annoying the people, for there was a great crowd, old people and children, nuns and

monks, who all were crying bitterly. The tribunes decided to go in to seize *him_j* and to kill with a sword those of the people who would resist them' (AM 264-5).

Topicalization (left dislocation)

(5)
nai de eta-f-čot-ou nče (...) Petros
 DEM:PL PART TEMP-3.SG.M-say-3.PL NOM Petros
 'After Petros had said it' (lit. these)' (AM, 266).

Nominal realizations

(6) with demonstratives

ti-na-tounos t-ai baki tēr=s ehrēi ečō=k
 1SG-FUT₁-raise F.SG-DEM city whole=3SG.F up on=2SG.M
 'I will raise this entire city against you' (AM, 27).

(7) occasionally with body parts

(a)
satof a pi-archēaggelos Michaēl souten te=f-čič ebol
 immediately PERF₁ SDEF.M.SG-archangel Michael reach POSS.F=3SG.M-hand out
 'Immediately the archangel Michael reached out his hand' (AM, 292).

(b)
ouoh a=f-i epesēt ebolkhen t-phe
 PART PERF₁=3.SG.M-go down from WDEF.F.SG-heaven
nče Michaēl a-f-hioui n-te=f-čič ebol
 NOM Michael PERF₁=3SG.M-reach ACC-POSS.F=3SG.M-hand out
 'And Michael descended from heaven (and) reached his hand out' (AM, 326).

Head marking of the Undergoer is practically limited to pronominal reference (personal clitics and demonstratives). **From this it follows that such Undergoers are predominantly discourse topics.**

Head marked Actors vis-à-vis head marked Undergoers

- Intraverbal (head marked) Actors: demotion (detopicalization)
- Head marked Undergoers: topicalization

This is the opposite of the prototypical pragmatic functions of these constituents and possibly can be interpreted as a kind of substitute to passivization.

Table 4. Iconic relations between the accessibility of a referent and a corresponding nominal expression: maximal contrast is preferred to symmetry

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| the referent | more accessible | ←-----→ | less accessible |
| | \boxed{f} | (<i>mno=f</i>) (NP) | $\boxed{n-NP}$ |
| the linguistic expression | less elaborate | ←-----→ | more elaborate |

Restricted type frequency of head marked Undergoers:

- Head marking is allowed in *selected tenses*: the durative (atelic) tenses, Praesens 1, Imperfect and Circumstantial, are excluded.
- Head marking is ungrammatical in the following classes of verbs:

- verbs of Greek origin;
- some ‘indigenous’ Coptic verbs which allow only dependent marking by means of *mmo=f*: ‘kill’, ‘torture’, ‘worship’, ‘put’, ‘send’;
- verbs whose second argument is marked by a preposition other than *n/-mmo=* .

Obligatory marking of the Undergoer by other prepositions (see Zakrzewska 2017b).

The most frequent prepositions used to mark the second argument are the following: originally allative preposition *e-/ero=* ‘to’ and originally dative preposition *n-/na=* ‘for, to’.

The verbal predicates whose second arguments are marked by either *e-/ero=* or *n-/na=* can tentatively be divided into six semantic classes, representing various types of non-prototypical affectedness of the Undergoer (see Næss 2007, Dąbrowska 1997; for other accounts of prototypical transitivity see e.g. Hopper & Thomson 1980; Haspelmath 2015).

- *e-/ero=*

Verbs denoting contact-by-motion: ‘hit’; ‘touch’; ‘kiss’.

The Undergoer is *superficially affected*, which contrasts with prototypical, *total*, affectedness with externally observable effects. On a divergent way of marking of the Undergoer of verbs denoting superficial bodily contact, see Malchukov (2005: 83-86), Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005: 21-33). See also Wierzbicka (1988: 391-461), Holvoet (1991: 99-121), Holvoet & Nau (2014) and Beytenbrat (2015) for parallels from Slavic, Baltic and Fennic.

Verbs of perception and cognition: ‘see/look’; ‘hear/listen’; ‘know’; ‘believe’; ‘hope’.

The Undergoer is not affected but is a stimulus or source, which implies some *instigation*. According to Rice and Kabata (2007: 483) this is extension of the allative into the *mental domain*: “the perceiver/conceiver [can be seen] as moving figuratively towards the percept/concept” .

Verbs of speech actions: ‘condemn’; ‘bless’; ‘beseech’; ‘swear’; conjure’; ‘bewitch’.

The use of *e-/ero=* is here an extension of the allative into the *social domain*, which results in constructions similar to those with the allative/dative preposition *a* (as opposed to zero) marking human patients in e.g. Spanish and colloquial Italian (Differential Object Marking). In such cases, the Undergoer is not “an occasional and arbitrary patient [but a] protagonist [who] belongs to what *precedes* the materialization of the subject-object relation. In this reversed causality link, the object is at the basis of the subject-object relationship and motivates its materialization” (Delbeque 2002: 90, 98). This implies a certain amount of *instigation* or agency on the part of the Undergoer, who has a certain role to play and is therefore partly ‘responsible’ for the resultant change of state. See also Dąbrowska (1997: 49-54) and Roegiest (2007), among many others. However, in contrast to DOM in Romance, the use of *e-/ero=* in Coptic is fully grammaticalized.

Verbs denoting activities by which the Undergoer’s *sphere of influence* (see Dąbrowska 1997) is positively or detrimentally affected by the Actor: ‘overcome’; ‘guard’; ‘have mercy’; ‘take pity’; ‘help’; ‘serve’.

- *n-/na=*

Verbs of speech actions which positively or detrimentally affect the Undergoer’s *sphere of influence* (Dąbrowska 1997): ‘promise’; ‘advice’; ‘order’.

Verbs of ritual behavior (whether or not in combination with speech actions) which affect the Undergoer’s *personal sphere*: awareness, mental disposition, self-esteem etc. (Dąbrowska 1997): ‘honour’; ‘glorify’; ‘put to shame’; ‘disgrace’; ‘baptize’; ‘instruct’.

Interim conclusions

The preposition *n-/mmo=* as the marker of the Undergoer should be considered a member of two oppositions at the same time:

n-/mmo= vs. head marking: a syntagmatic opposition, based on relations between “a unit and others in the same string” (Broden 2006: 173), symbolically indicated as \leftrightarrow , (**DOM**)
n-/mmo= vs. another preposition: a set of paradigmatic oppositions which “oppose a unit to others that could replace it in a given sequence” (Broden 2006: 174), indicated as \updownarrow .

Table 5. Two subsystems of transitivity

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Head marking (semantically marked member of opposition 1): possible under specific aspectual and discursive conditions: telicity of the predicate and topicality of the Undergoer (DOM, see Witzlack-Makarevich & Seržant 2018); considerable variation across dialects, genres and corpora (Engsheden 2006, 2008, 2018).</p> | <p>\leftrightarrow <i>n-/mmo=</i> (semantically unmarked member of oppositions 1 and 2) \updownarrow Dependent marking: decreasing affectedness and/or increasing agency of the Undergoer; fairly uniform across dialects, genres and corpora</p> |
| | <p><i>e-/ero=</i> (semantically marked member of opposition 2) \updownarrow <i>n-/na=</i> (semantically marked member of opposition 2) \updownarrow Other prepositions</p> |

I consider the preposition *n-/mmo=* as the unmarked, default member of either opposition. The other members can only occur in semantically marked situations. Moreover, in spite of the high token frequency of head marked Actors and Undergoers, it is the dependent marking strategy which is the dominant one, that is the one with a broader range of functions (higher type frequency).

Following Roegiest (2007), I would like to treat the two oppositions schematically presented in Table 7 as manifestations of two *subsystems of transitivity* simultaneously present in Coptic, one of which is based on aspect (telicity) and referential properties of the arguments (head marking vs. *n-/mmo=*), the other one on their agency *vis-à-vis* affectedness (*n-/mmo=* vs. *e-/ero=* vs. *n-na=* etc.). Roegiest identifies two such subsystems in two different Romance languages, Rumanian (referentiality-based subsystem) and Spanish (agency-based subsystem). Interestingly, in Coptic the two subsystems of transitivity exist side by side in one language.

Differential Recipient Marking: personal sphere & sphere of influence (Zakrzewska 2015)

The Recipient (the third argument) must be marked by one of the two prepositions:

- originally dative preposition *n-/na=* ‘for, to’ (strategy ‘inherited’ from the earlier Egyptian);
- originally allative preposition *e-/ero=* ‘to’ (innovation of Coptic).

(8)

| | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| <i>phē</i> | <i>eta=f-erpke-ti</i> | <i>nō=ten</i> | <i>n-tai</i> | <i>eksousia</i> |
| DEM.SG.M | REL=3SG.M-also-give | DAT_2PL | ACC-DEM.SG.F | power |
| <i>nthof</i> | <i>eth-na-ol=s</i> | <i>nten=thēnou</i> | | |
| he | REL-FUT ₁ -withdraw=3SG.F | from=2PL | | |
| <i>nte=f-tēi=s</i> | | <i>e-ke-ouai</i> | | |
| CONJ=3SG.M-give=SG.F | | ALL-other-one | | |

‘(Christ, the true God) who also has given this power to you (...), it is Him who will withdraw it from you (...) and give it to another one’ (AM, 211).

Table 6. The cline of prototypical vs. non-prototypical affectedness in Recipients vis-à-vis Undergoers

| | total change with externally observable effects | ‘superficial’ change (lit. or met.) | change in one’s personal sphere |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| The Undergoer’s affectedness | <i>n-/mmo=</i> | <i>e-/ero=</i> | <i>n-/na=</i> |
| The Recipient’s affectedness | | <i>e-/ero=</i> | <i>n-/na=</i> |

The lighter the color, the less prototypical affectedness of the referent.

These alternations reflect a **preponderance of the so-called characterizing function of case marking over the discriminating function**. In contrast to the discriminating function, that is to differentiating the core arguments (Actor, Undergoer and Recipient), the characterizing function consists in ‘flagging’ of certain semantic properties of the arguments, such as departures from prototypical semantic features or differences in referential properties and/or relative topicality (see e.g. Næss 2007: 153-160, Kittilä 2008: 247-248, 259-260, Malchukov & De Swart 2009: 347-351).

Typological peculiarities

The mutual ordering of the Undergoer and Recipient in Coptic is problematic. If both these constituents are present in a clause and are equally ‘heavy’, they occur precisely in that order. This is a typological peculiarity, since according to Heine and König (2010: 99), if both second and third argument are marked by a preposition, their expected order is exactly opposite: the third argument precedes the second one in 96% of languages in their sample. (See also Depuydt 1997, Gensler 1998, Siewierska & Bakker 2007). As a consequence, constituent order in Coptic reflects not so much the syntactic functions subject and object of the constituents as their syntactic scope (centripetal ordering, Dik 1997, vol. 1, 401-402, 417-419).

Suggested explanations

Explanation 1: a comprehensive model of alignment shift in Bohairic Coptic

Table 7.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Alignment type | Morphosyntactic | representational (based on the semantic functions of the arguments). |
| Type of case marking | head marking | dependent marking (prepositions) |
| Main function of case marking | discriminatory | characterizing |
| Semantic underpinning | aspect (telicity); referentiality of the Undergoer | decreasing affectedness / increasing agency of the Undergoer |
| Distribution: synchronic | limited to selected types of constructions, variation across dialects, genres, corpora | quasi-universal |
| Distribution: diachronic | recessive | productive |
| Syntactic and pragmatic functions of the arguments in a clause | non-topical Actors and topical Undergoers, a substitute of passive | topical Actors and non-topical Undergoers |
| Constituent order | syntactic perspectivizing: A1 precedes A2; A1 precedes non-A1 | Centripetal (reflecting syntactic scope): Pred<A2<A3<A1 |

Explanation 2: Greek valency patterns in Coptic?

Marginally attested in earlier stages of Egyptian, the prepositional marking started to play a significant role in the period of intensive language contact between Egyptian and Greek. The question arises whether the development of new marking strategies in Coptic could have been triggered by language contact with Greek.

Classical Greek has canonical passive, nominative/accusative alignment and morphological case endings which are notoriously resistant to grammatical borrowing in the situation in language contact (Johanson 2009, Matras 2007: 42-44).

Grammatical borrowing, however, can involve not only borrowing of actual grammatical morphemes but also of abstract patterns. In Matras and Sakel's (2007) terminology this distinction is labeled as *MAT* vs. *PAT-borrowings*:

MAT: "morphological material and its phonological shape from one language is replicated in another language."

PAT: "only the patterns of the other language are replicated, i.e. the organization, distribution and mapping of grammatical and semantic meaning, while the form itself is not borrowed."

Sakel (2007: 15).

Could Coptic writers borrow, or calque, Greek *valency patterns*?

In Classical Greek, the so-called characterizing function of case marking vis-à-vis the discriminating function is quite prominent. For example, various degrees of the Undergoer's affectedness can be signaled by different case forms. Next to the default accusative, the dative is

used to express affectedness pertaining to the patient's personal sphere and the genitive for signaling a lower degree of the patient's affectedness (see Kühner, Blass & Gerth 1890-1904: 406-426 for the various functions of the dative and 343-382 for the genitive; Van Emde Boas et al. (2019: 360-382) see also Chanet 1994 for a genitive/dative alternation with some verbs.

In Zakrzewska (2017b) I examined the non-default marking of the Undergoer in both languages involved: *e-/ero=* and *n-/na=* in Coptic *vis-à-vis* genitive and dative in Greek. My aim was to discern in this way possible correspondences between *valency patterns*: is there evidence in my corpus for systematic correspondences between the use of the prepositions *e-/ero=* or *n-/na=* in Coptic and the genitive or dative in Greek, which could point to calquing or replicating Greek non-default marking in Coptic?

Table 8. Semantic classes of Coptic verbs with *e-/ero=* or *n-/na=* and the valency of their Greek equivalents

| | | |
|---|----------------|--|
| Verbs denoting contact-by-motion | <i>e-/ero=</i> | 'hit'; 'kiss': Acc 'touch': Gen |
| Verbs of perception and cognition | <i>e-/ero=</i> | 'see/look'; 'know': Acc ; 'hear/listen': Acc/ Gen (source) 'believe'; 'hope': Dat |
| Verbs of speech actions | <i>e-/ero=</i> | 'condemn'; 'bless'; 'beseech'; 'swear'; conjure'; 'bewitch': Acc |
| Verbs denoting <i>activities</i> by which the Undergoer's sphere of influence is positively or detrimentally affected by the Actor | <i>e-/ero=</i> | 'overcome'; 'guard'; 'have mercy'; 'take pity': Acc 'help'; 'serve': Dat |
| Verbs of <i>speech actions</i> which positively or detrimentally affect the Undergoer's sphere of influence | <i>n-/na=</i> | 'promise'; 'advice'; 'order': Dat |
| Verbs of <i>ritual behavior</i> (whether or not in combination with speech actions) which affect the Undergoer's personal sphere: awareness, mental disposition, self-esteem etc. | <i>n-/na=</i> | 'honour'; 'glorify'; 'put to shame'; 'disgrace'; 'baptize'; 'instruct': Acc |

The results of this analysis are the following.

Most of the Greek equivalents of the Coptic verbs which require *e-/ero=* or *n-/na=*, have their second argument marked by the default accusative case (with a few exceptions). In other words, most situations in which Coptic uses *e-/ero=* or *n-/na=* to express decreasing affectedness or increasing agency of the Undergoer are not treated in Greek as divergent from the transitive prototype. Significantly, loan verbs of Greek origin pattern with semantically related 'native Egyptian' verbs rather than with their Greek 'originals'.

Only one category of Undergoers is systematically marked by the dative in Greek: those whose sphere of influence is affected as a result of the Actor's speech actions: 'promise'; 'advice'; 'order'. In these cases, however, Greek influence cannot be straightforwardly assumed, as marking by *n-/na=* is here inherited from pre-Coptic Egyptian. Moreover, dative-like marking of the Undergoer in such situations is also quite common cross-linguistically and due to semantic factors rather than conditioned by language contact (see Næss 2009, see also Zakrzewska 2015 for parallels from Romance and Slavic).

As it appears, as far as my material is concerned there is no one-to-one correspondence between Coptic and Greek valency patterns. In other words, no evidence can be found for grammatical borrowing of the PAT-type in this domain. Although both Greek and Coptic have formal means to mark the Undergoer's non-prototypical affectedness (the dative or genitive in Greek, *e-/ero=* or *n-/na=* in Coptic), the use of these means with specific semantic classes of verbs is language specific.

On a more general level, it should be noted that Coptic and Greek were drifting apart as regards case marking and transitivity: especially from the third century AD onwards, their respective case systems were evolving in the opposite directions. While Coptic built out the prepositional marking in order to express various types of prototypical vs. non-prototypical transitivity, the development of Greek followed a divergent path, resulting in the expansion of the default patientive case, the accusative, at the expense of the dative and genitive. Moreover, 'bare' case forms tended to be reinforced by prepositions, which pointed to semantic bleaching of those forms. (see Luraghi and Narrog 2014: 3-9, Bortone 2010: 177-180, 203-205, Horrocks 2010: 246-47, 284-85, among others). In this way, the characterizing function of case gained more importance in Coptic, while in Greek this function was decreasing.

Some Greek influence on Coptic marking strategies can only be assumed on the most abstract level. Greek could influence the emergent Coptic literary idiom by activating certain sensitivity to non-prototypical transitive situations, in other words to the characterizing function of case. As for the formal expressive devices, Coptic could build out the already existent 'native' prepositional strategy (as Greek case endings were too difficult to borrow).

As observed in the literature on language contact, borrowing of grammatical patterns can in most cases be seen as integrating them into patterns which already exist in the recipient language by means of an enhancement of an already existing feature, extension by analogy or reinterpretation and reanalysis (Aikhenvald 2006: 22-23). Another well attested path is activating latent universal tendencies in the recipient language. As a result, the frequency of some patterns of use increases, which can eventually lead to the rise of new grammatical categories, that is stable form-meaning combinations (Heine and Kuteva 2005: 74-75).

In conclusion, the available evidence suggests that if there was Greek influence on Coptic case, it was neither MAT- nor PAT-borrowing but at the most "creative restructuring" (Johanson 2009: 496): the refined case system obtained in this process was neither 'Greek' nor 'Egyptian' but innovative with respect to both languages.

Conclusions and discussion

In my opinion, Explanation 1 is more plausible than 2. It ascribes several seemingly disparate phenomena to a single cause: the loss of the morphological passive. The circumstances of this loss are obscure, but in any case it cannot have been Greek influence. According to the theory of Functional (Discourse) Grammar on which this explanation is based, as Coptic has no passive, alignment in this language by definition cannot be described in terms of the assignment of syntactic functions. On closer inspection, the form and ordering of the arguments are determined by their semantic functions, which is characteristic for representational, more specifically semantic, alignment. The DSM/DOM and the attested variation are due to the receding remains of the former, syntactic alignment, while the new, semantically based organization of the marking strategies is in fact quite systematic.

The circumstances which could plead in favor of Explanation 2 are the 'temporal coincidence' and the fact that Coptic writers leaned heavily on the Greek literary heritage. This necessitated some

‘linguistic engineering’ in order to emulate the Greek rhetorical strategies and lexis. In this situation, a certain amount of ‘creative restructuring’ in the grammatical domain would not be inconceivable. What is improbable, however, is a wholesale systematic rearrangement of the strategies for argument marking. Moreover, as mentioned above, the verbs borrowed from Greek were fitted into the apparently pre-existing Coptic valency patterns.

As a consequence, Coptic is characterized by an uncommon typological make-up and in that respect differs radically from pre-Coptic Egyptian.

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