

Thetic utterances in Bohairic Coptic

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1. Introduction

1.1. Coptic and the corpus examined

Coptic (Afro-Asiatic) is the final stage of the Ancient Egyptian language. Egyptian is the language with the longest attested history: from ca. 3000 BC till ca. AD 1100. In the course of these four millennia Egyptian underwent major grammatical changes and it can be divided into five stages called, rather predictably Old, Middle and Late Egyptian, followed by Demotic and Coptic. For the purposes of linguistic analysis these five stages of development can be considered separate languages. As Egyptian 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 was used in Egypt and to some extent also in Nubia and is attested in written sources since the fourth century AD till the eleventh century when it was superseded by Arabic.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. In contrast to the earlier historical stages of Egyptian, Coptic does not use any of the native Egyptian writing systems such as hieroglyphs or the graphically simplified systems called hieratic and demotic. As Egypt in Late Antiquity was a multilingual country with Greek enjoying the status of the principal literary and administrative language, the Greek alphabet was adopted for writing in Coptic by adding seven characters based on demotic signs to the 24 originally Greek characters (see also Zakrzewska *fc.*).

The grammar of Coptic is still poorly described. For basic linguistic information on Egyptian and Coptic, you can consult Loprieno (2001, 2008) and Loprieno & Müller (2012). Of the two main literary varieties of Coptic, Sahidic and Bohairic, only Sahidic has a reference grammar that meets contemporary linguistic standards (Reintges 2004). My contribution is devoted to the other variety, Bohairic. It is based on my original research of a single corpus of narrative texts, the *Martyrs Acts*, edited by H. Hyvernat (1886/1977), and is part of my larger research project on the linguistics of Bohairic narrative.

(1) The structure of the Martyrs Acts

Sender (Superhelper) → Object/Goal → Receiver/Beneficiary

↑
Helper → Subject ← Opponent

Zakrzewska (2011) after Toolan (2001: 82-3),
Propp (1928/1970) and Greimas (1966).

1.2. Thetic (as opposed to categorial) utterances (Sasse 1987, 1995):

- a single information unit,
- not necessarily all-new,
- neutral to focus,
- event-central or entity-central,
- not necessarily monoargumental,
- several discourse functions.

2. Thetic utterances in canonical functions

2.1. Existential utterances (introductory function)

(2)

ΛΣΨΩΠΙ	ΔΕ	ἦΕΝ	ΘΜΕΤΟΥΡΟ	ΝΔΙΟΚΛΗΤΙΑΝΟΣ (...)
<i>a=s-šōpi</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>khen</i>	<i>th-met-ouro</i>	<i>n-dioklētianos (...)</i>
PERF1=3SG.F-happen	PART	in	WDEF.SG.F-reign	GEN- Diocletian

‘It happened during the reign of Diocletian (...)

ΝΕ	ΟΥΟΝ	ΟΥΝΙΨ†	ΔΕ	ΝΣΤΡΑΤΗΛΑΤΗΣ
<i>ne</i>	<i>ouon</i>	<i>ou-ništi</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>n-stratēlatēs</i>
IPFV	be	INDF.SG-eminent	PART	ATTR-general

ΝΤΕ	ΠΟΥΡΟ	ΠΕ
<i>nte</i>	<i>p-ouro</i>	<i>pe</i>
GEN	WDEF.M.SG-emperor	IPFV

there was an eminent general of the emperor

ΕΨΤΑΙΗΟΥΤ	ΝΤΟΤΨ	ΕΜΑΨΩ
<i>e=f-taiēout</i>	<i>ntot=f</i>	<i>emašō</i>
CIRC=3SG.M-respect	with-3SG.M	very

who stood in very high regard with him.’ (AM, 1)

2.2. Presentative utterances (annuntiative function)

(3)

ΝΑΙ	ΔΕ	ΕΤΑΨΧΟΤΟΥ	ΖΗΠΠΕ	ΙΣ	ΠΙΑΡΧΗΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ	ΕΘΟΥΑΒ
<i>nai</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>eta=f-čot=ou</i>	<i>hēppe</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>pi-arkhēangelos</i>	<i>ethouab</i>
These	PART	TEMP=3SG.M-say=3PL	PART	PART	SDEF.M.SG-archangel	REL-holy

ΡΑΦΑΗΛ	ΑΨΟΖΙ	ΕΡΑΤΨ	ΣΑΨΩΙ	ΜΜΟΨ
<i>raphaēl</i>	<i>a=f-ohi</i>	<i>erat=f</i>	<i>sapšōi</i>	<i>mmo=f</i>
Raphaēl	PERF1=3SG.M-stand	PREP=3SG.M	above	PREP=3SG.M

‘After he had said this, see, the holy Archangel Raphael came to stand above him.’ (AM, 37).

2.3. Natural phenomena (descriptive function)

(4)

ΕΤΑ ΠΙΟΥΩΙΝΙ	ΔΕ	ΩΑΙ
<i>eta pi-ouōini</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>šai</i>
TEMP SDEF.M.SG-light	PART	rise

‘When dawn had appeared

ΑΦΤΩΝΦ	ΝΧΕ ΑΠΑΤΗΡ
<i>a=f-tōn=f</i>	<i>nče Apatēr</i>
PERF1=3.M.SG-rise=REFL.3SG.m	NOM Apatēr

Apater rose

ΑΦΝΕΖΣΙ	ΝΗΡΑΙ	ΤΕΦΣΩΝΙ
<i>a=f-nehsi</i>	<i>n-Ērai</i>	<i>tef-sōni</i>
PERF1=3.G.M-wake up	ACC-Ērai	POSS:F.SG:3.M.SG-sister

[and] woke up his sister Ērai’. (AM, 88).

3. Head marking and theticity

3.1. Head marking vs. double marking of nominal subjects: information structure and accessibility (see Zakrzewska 2006).

- 1) Head marking: the intraverbal position of the nominal subject, viz. between the Aux-morpheme in the construct or pronominal state and the verbal stem, in complementary distribution with a third person clitic (see exx. 4 above and 7-9 below);
- 2) Double marking (topicalization of the subject): the zero-marked nominal subject appears in front of the verbal cluster in which it is resumed by means of a clitic (“no case before the verb”, König 2008), see exx. 3 above and 5 below);

(5)

ΠΟΥΡΟ	ΔΕ	ΑΦΕΡΩΦΗΡΙ
<i>p-ouro</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>a=ʃ-eršphēri</i>
WDEF.M.SG-emperor	PART	PERF1=3SG.M-wonder

ΟΥΟΖ	ΑΦΤΩΟΥ	ΜΦΤ
<i>ouoh</i>	<i>a=ʃ-tiōou</i>	<i>m-ph(nou)ti</i>
PART	PERF1=3SG.M-praise	ACC-WDEF.M.SG-God

‘The emperor wondered and praised God’ (AM, 191).

- 3) Double marking 2 (subject as ‘anti-topic’, see Lambrecht 1994: 202-5): the subject, introduced by a dedicated marker *nče*, appears usually at the rightmost edge of the clause and resumes a clitic within the verbal cluster.

(6)

ΟΥΟΖ	ΑΦΕΡΚΕΛΕΥΙΝ	ΝΧΕ ΠΙΑΝΟΜΟΣ
<i>ouoh</i>	<i>a=f-erkeleuin</i>	<i>nče pi-anomos</i>
PART	PERF1=3SG.M-order	NOM SDEF.M.SG-lawless

ΝΣΕΖΙΤΦ	ΕΠΩΤΕΚΟ
<i>nse-hit=f</i>	<i>e-pi-šteko</i>
CONJ.3.PL-throw=3SG.M	ALL-SDEF.M.SG-prison

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

3.2. Head marking: subject-as-no-topic

(7) sudden events, interruptive function:

ΟΥΟΖ	ἦΕΝ	†ΟΥΝΟΥ	α	ΝΕΦΖΒΩC
<i>ouoh</i>	<i>xen</i>	<i>ti-ounou</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ne=f-hbōs</i>
PART	PREP	SDEF.F.SG-hour	PERF1	POSS:PL=3SG.M-clothes

ΦΟΡΦΕΡ	ΕΒΟΛ	ΜΜΟϚ
<i>forfer</i>	<i>ebol</i>	<i>mmo=f</i>
fall	out	ACC=3SG.M

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

(8) first (and last) mention of ‘bystanders’ (as opposed to topical participants, see ex. 2)

αCΩΠΙ	ΔΕ	ΝΟΥΕΖΟΥ	α	ΟΥCΖΙΜΙ	Ι
<i>a=s-šōpi</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>n-ou-ehoou</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ou-shimi</i>	<i>i</i>
PERF1=3SG.F-happen	PART	in-INDEF.SG-day	PERF1	INDEF.SG-woman	come

Ε†ΕΚΚΛΗCΙΑ	ΕΟΥΟΝ	ΟΥΠΝΑ	ΝΑΚΑΘΑΡΤΟΝ	ΝΕΜΑC
<i>e-ti-ekklēsia</i>	<i>e-ouon</i>	<i>ou-pn(eum)a</i>	<i>n-akatharton</i>	<i>nema=s</i>
to-SDEF.F.SG-church	CIRC-be	INDEF.SG-spirit	ATTR-impure	with=3SG.F

‘It happened one day that a woman haunted by an impure spirit came to the church.’ (AM, 252).

(9) supernatural beings and wonders (annuntiative function, comparable to ex. 3)

ΟΥΟΖ	α	ΠΙCΩΤΗΡ	ΝΑΓΑΘΟC	ΝΙΦΙ	ΕἶΟΥΝ
<i>ouoh</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>pi-sōtēr</i>	<i>n-agathos</i>	<i>nifi</i>	<i>exoun</i>
PART	PERF1	SDEF.M.SG-Saviour	ATTR-good	breath	into

ἦΕΝ	ΠΕΦΖΟ	ΠΕΧΑϚ	ΝΑϚ
<i>xen</i>	<i>pef-ho</i>	<i>peča=f</i>	<i>na=f</i>
in	POSS:3.M.SG-fac	say-3.M.SG	DAT-3.M.SG

ΧΕ	ΒΙ	ΝΑΚ	ΝΟΥΠΝΑ	ΕΦΟΥΑΒ
<i>če</i>	<i>čhi</i>	<i>na=k</i>	<i>n-ou-pn(eum)a</i>	<i>e=f-ouab</i>
QUOT	receive\IMP	DAT=2SG.M.	ACC-INDEF.SG-spirit	CIRC=3SG.M-holy

‘And the good Saviour breathed into his face (and) said to him: “Receive a holy spirit”’ (AM, 54).

4. Quotative indexes and thcticity (see Gündelman 2008; Gündelman & Von Roncador, eds., 2002; Kammerzell & Peust 2002; Gündelman 2012).

4.1. Quotative indexes as ‘aural punctuation marks’ (Foley 1993). Performance and mimesis: Foley (1999: 104, 221-224); Ott (2003: 193-202); Lüthi (1975: 88-89).

4.2. Three layers of quotative indexes in Coptic:

- the quotative particle **χε** *če* (< Eg. *r-dd* ‘to be said’): introduction of reported discourse (direct and indirect), complement clauses and names in naming constructions;

- the generic speech verb *peče-* /*peča*= ‘say’ (head marking: a vestigial form of the so-called suffixal conjugation, etymologically derived from the quotative index *p3-dd*= ‘that what he said’) followed by the quotative particle *če* (see ex. 9 above);
- a circumstantial clause with the generic speech verb *čō* ‘say’ and the marker *e-* expressing simultaneity, followed by the particle *če*, see ex. (10) below:

(10)

ΑΠΑΤΗΡ	ΔΕ	ΑΦΕΡΟΥΩ	ΝΑϞ [...]	ΕΦΧΩ	ΜΜΟC
<i>Apatēr</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>a=f-erouō</i>	<i>na=f</i> [...]	<i>e-f-čō</i>	<i>mmo=s</i>
Apatēr	PART	PERF1=3SG.M-answer	DAT=3SG.M [...]	CIRC-3.M.SG-say	ACC=3SG.F

ΧΕ	ΙΩC	ΜΜΟΚ	ΜΑ	ΑΠΟΦΑCΙC	ΕΡΟΝ
<i>če</i>	<i>iōs</i>	<i>mmo=k</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>apophasis</i>	<i>ero=n</i>
PART	hasten\IMP	REFL=2SG.M	give\IMP	verdict	ALL=1PL

‘And Apatēr answered him [...] saying this: “Hasten yourself (and) sentence us”’ (AM, 97).

Each of the three indexes can follow a clause with a specific or generic speech verb. They differ in the degree of grammaticalization and discourse functions:

- *e=f-čō mmo=s* is least grammaticalized and typically introduces lengthy speeches or particularly salient utterances which form the climax or resolution of the paragraph;
- *peče-* /*peča*= can be used at the beginning and in the body of a paragraph. In this last use it functions as a turn-taking marker, akin to stage directions: “X said ... to Y, thereupon Y said ... to X, then X said ... to Y, etc. etc.” This resembles the so-called reactive/consequential function, postulated by Matras (1995) as a possible discourse functions of thetic utterances.

5. Conclusions and discussion

- the affinity of head marking and theticity (see Fiedler 2014);
- the status of quotative indexes in the situation of oral performance;
- special constructions for supernatural beings and wonders? (see Shisha-Halevy 2007).

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