Reconsidering possessives in Middle Egyptian and beyond

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Introduction

Aims

➢ to examine the distribution of adnominal possessive constructions in Middle Egyptian as compared to other language stages

➢ to interpret the results diachronically, examining how these claims fit with the idea of cyclical change in the theory of grammaticalization

Roadmap

• the cyclical nature of language change
• possessive constructions from Coptic / Later Egyptian to Middle Egyptian
• evaluation of the results of a corpus-based investigation
About the cyclical nature of language change

Grammaticalization is unidirectional  (Hopper - Traugott 1991: 16-17)
   lexical material > grammatical item > even more grammatical item

Language changes are cyclical (van Gelderen 2011)
Another term instead of linguistic cycle: spiral (see Hagège 1993: 147)
   E.g.  Jespersen's cycle / negative cycle (Jespersen 1917 and many others following)
   definiteness cycle (Greenberg 1978 and Lyons 1999)

   Haspelmath (2015):  on three degrees of grammaticalization in Egyptian
   involving the notion of linguistic cycle

Typological considerations

The so called alienability split

   archaic construction ∼ inalienable possession ∼ head-marking
   innovative construction ∼ alienable possession ∼ dependent-marking
      (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001: 965-966)

   • Inalienable or relational nouns rarely occur outside a possessive construction
   • Inalienable or relational nouns occur in possessive constructions more often than non-relational ones

   Frequency > predictability > less need for grammatical marking
      (Haspelmath 2008 citing Zipf 1935)
Adnominal possessive constructions in Egyptian

More than one strategy in all periods of Egyptian

Word order:  [ possessed noun ] + [ possessor expression ]

Formal difference:
• absence or presence of a linking element  \( A B \) vs. \( A n B \)
• the form of the linking element  \( A n B \) vs. \( A nte B \)
• locality constraints  \( *A (...) B \) vs. \( A (...) n B \)

Coptic

• a comparative study of adnominal possessive constructions in the early dialects of Coptic (Egedi 2010, 2012 and forthcoming)
• based on a corpus of carefully collected data which mainly come from gospel texts of 4th-6th century manuscripts
**Pattern A**

(1) ἐφήμερ ἐφίπποινοιτε  
p-šēre m-p-noute  
DEF:MSG-son POSS:DEF:MSG-isten  
the son of God

(2) οὐπολίς ἔντετσαμαρία  
o-u-poli snte-t-samaria  
INDEF:SG-town POSS:DEF:FG-Samaria  
a town of Samaria

(3) πειςφήμερ ἐνπερφωμε  
pei-šēre m-npte-p-rôme  
DEM:MSG-son POSS:DEF:MSG-man  
this son of the man

(4) πωςήμερ ἐνουωτ ἐνπεπνοινοτε  
p-šēre n-ouot m-p-noute  
DEF:MSG-son AJIZ:single POSS:DEF:MSG-god  
the only son of God

(5) προσ ἐνπεισραήλ  
p-erro mnte-p-israel  
DEF:MSG-king poss:DEF:MSG:MSG-Israel  
the king of Israel

(6) προσ ἐνπεισραήλ  
p-erro m-p-israel  
DEF:MSG-king POSS:DEF:MSG-M-Israel  
the king of Israel

The distribution of the two patterns is not complementary:

92,6 %

7,4 %

Sahidic
Other dialects (4th-6th c.)

**Sahidic-type dialects** (S, L5, A, M, W): syntactic split (definiteness+adjacency)

**Bohairic-type dialects** (B4, B5, F4, F5): syntactic + semantic (alienability) split

**Transitional dialects** (L4, V4): spreading of the new pattern, but no lexical restriction on the old pattern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessive constructions</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>B4</th>
<th>B5</th>
<th>L4</th>
<th>V4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pattern B</strong> (nte-)</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>7,4%</td>
<td>76,4%</td>
<td>55,2%</td>
<td>21,4%</td>
<td>14,45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Late Egyptian and Demotic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coptic</th>
<th>Pattern A</th>
<th>Pattern B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LE</td>
<td>( A \ p^3 \ B )</td>
<td>( p^3 \ A \ n \ p^3 \ B )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>( A \ B )</td>
<td>( A \ n \ B )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **A direct genitive**
- **B indirect genitive**

\[ \text{LE } p^3 \ A \ B \rightarrow \text{compounds} \]

(7) \( \text{c\text{}wy } p^3 \ ntr \)

‘the hands of God’

(LRL 1,8]

(8) \( \text{c } p^3 \ ntr \)

‘the hand of God’

[‘Onchsheshonqy 11:23]

- In pattern \( A \ p^3 \ B \) designations for inalienable objects, such as body parts, terms related to persons (name, condition), kinship terms, certain topographic designations, etc. (Junge 1996: §2.1.3(2) and §3.1.4)

  > Alienability split!

- NB. A shrinking subset of these nouns behaves likewise in Demotic decrees (Simpson 1996, 81-82)
Middle Egyptian

A B
direct genitive

A n B  (A. t n. t  B, A. w n. w  B)
indirect genitive

Callendar (1975: 66; §4.2.7): “no longer productive and (...) seems best to be considered as compounding rather than a genuine genitive construction”.

Schenkel (1991: 122, 2005: 133): the pattern is partially productive, in more or less fixed expressions, or expressions that are constructed through certain production samples (especially in titles)

Loprieno (1995: 57): still a productive device in classical Egyptian, admitting that it was “not as frequent as in Akkadian, Hebrew or Arabic, and tended to be replaced by the analytic construction”

Shisha-Halevy (2007b: 239): partially productive, mainly compounding, “often, but certainly not always, terminological, phrasological or idiomatic”.

Jansen-Winkeln (2000: 29): not a mere compound but a free operation of combining words, admitting that in several individual cases the given construction had become lexicalized as a compound noun

RULE-1: Productivity? ∅ consensus
Gardiner (1957: 65-66) direct genitive construction was usual “wherever the connexion between governing and governed noun is particularly close, as in titles, set phrases, etc.”
- An attribute modifying the possessed noun normally follows the whole construction (9).
- If an element interrupts the sequence of the head noun and the possessor expression, the indirect construction must be used (10).

(9) \( jmj-r \ pr \ wr \) [Peas. B 1,47] \[A \ B\]  
‘great overseer of the house’

(10) \( jmjw-r=k \ nw \ rwy.t \) [Ptahhotep 442. L1] \[A \ n \ B\]  
‘your overseers of the portal’

**RULE-2:** Direct genitive requires strict adjacency
Middle Egyptian

\[
\begin{array}{cc}
A & B \\
\text{direct genitive} & A \ n \ B \\
& (A.t \ n.t \ B, A.w \ n.w \ B) \\
\text{indirect genitive} & \\
\end{array}
\]

- Bakir (1966: 35-36): the head noun of an indirect construction must always be regarded undefined, otherwise it must be defined
  ➢ definiteness split?

- Allen (2000: 41 §4.13): either the first noun (A) or the second (B) may be defined or undefined

Bakir's claim can easily be rejected on the basis of corpus investigation: in the majority of cases indirect genitives are also definite

**RULE-3:** Definiteness: \( \emptyset \) consensus
Middle Egyptian

A B
direct genitive

A n B (A. n.f n.w B, A.w n.w B)
indirect genitive

Strong hypothesis:
Frank Kammerzell (2000: 102): head-marked possessives used for inalienable possession, whereas dependent-marked (n.f-marked) possessives for alienable possession ➔ alienability split?

Weaker hypotheses:
Schenkel’s (1962) the unity of the rectum and regens is faster in the direct genitive than in the indirect one, and this fastness is basically influenced by the lexical meaning of the head noun.

Jansen-Winkeln (2000): the lexeme-type (e.g. nouns denoting body parts) and the form (e.g. monosyllabic masculine nouns) may influence the choice between the two constructions.

Shisha-Halevy (2007b: 239) with a grammaticalized restricted repertory AND with inalienable constituence association

RULE-4: Lexical restrictions: to be investigated!
A database of Middle Egyptian possessive constructions

♦ Time interval: only mss from the Middle Kingdom
♦ Text registers: literary, documentary, monumental, religious

Sources:

Literary texts

- The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor
- The Story of Sinuhe
- The Eloquent Peasant
- The Herdsman’s Story
- The Dispute of a Man with his Ba
- Instructions of Ptahhotep
- Instructions of Kagemni
- Loyalist Instruction
  (only the Sehotepibre version)

Documentary text

Heqanakht corpus (letters I-IV), Lahun papyri in the Petrie collection (UCL), Semna dispatches, Papyrus Reisner corpus (letters II, D-G) and some minor letters edited in James 1962

Monumental texts

a selection of royal inscriptions (e.g. Hammamat inscriptions, Boundary stelae of Sesostris III) and private biographical texts from Abydos, Aswan and Beni Hasan.
The data…

Data excluded:

- lexicalized items: compound prepositions, non-transparent compounds (r-pr, ewart-jb)
- ambiguous of/for cases: when the linker can also be interpreted as a dative preposition
- non-finite verbal form and its complement: the whole construction is nominal in the sentence, but the first member is a participle or an infinitive and the second member is its complement (subject/object)
- obscure places, uncertain readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGISTER</th>
<th>ALL POSS</th>
<th>DIRECT</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>INDIRECT</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>documentary</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literary</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monumental</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>1136</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RULE-1: Productivity

RULE-2: Strict adjacency

RULE-3: Definiteness

RULE-4: Lexical restrictions

RULE-1: Productivity?

- Productivity can hardly be tested without speakers
- The test for productivity is not necessarily frequency
- The real question: syntax or a morphology?
  - syntactic rules are normally automatic and as such productive
  - construct states and (Iranian) *izafet* constructions are generally considered intermediate cases (Spencer 2000: 314)
  - in certain languages, compounding can be just as productive as any syntactic operations.
### Testing syntactic restrictions

**RULE-2: Strict adjacency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(11)</td>
<td><code>sb3tj ḫm=f</code></td>
<td>Stela of Ikhernofret (6)</td>
<td><code>pupil of my majesty</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12)</td>
<td><code>sb3tj w^n ḫ</code></td>
<td>Stela of Ikhernofret (7)</td>
<td><code>the sole pupil of the palace</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13)</td>
<td><code>wd nswt</code></td>
<td>Sin B 180</td>
<td><code>the decree of the king</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14)</td>
<td><code>wd pn n nswt</code></td>
<td>Sin B 181</td>
<td><code>this decree of the king</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15)</td>
<td><code>ḥk3 ḥḥjt</code></td>
<td>Sin B 86</td>
<td><code>the ruler of a tribe</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16)</td>
<td><code>ḥk3 pn n rτnw</code></td>
<td>Sin B 99-100</td>
<td><code>this ruler of Retenu</code></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gardiner (1957: 65): examples where the direct genitive is separated from its noun are of extreme rarity.

In my corpus: 4 counterexamples
Testing syntactic restrictions
RULE-3: Definiteness

(17) 3t s3s3  
      ‘the moment of retreat’  
(18) 3t nt jrt 3bw  
      ‘a moment of interruption’ (lit. doing cessation)

Proposal: direct genitives are syntactically definite, but indirect genitive can freely be either definite or indefinite

NB. Once a compound has already been lexicalized ⇒ it can be indefinite

Testing semantic/lexical restrictions
RULE-4: alienability (or relational nouns)

The strong hypothesis of a pure alienability split can be challenged:

• many inalienable nouns are mainly attested in direct genitives, but many others (e.g. body parts such as jb, hr, tp, ḏḏḏ, etc. and relational nouns rn, tAS, etc.) prefer to appear in indirect genitive
• a core set of inherently relational lexemes (e.g. hmt, nb, jmj-r, ḥk3) that typically appear in direct genitives can sporadically be attested in indirect genitives
• a set of lexemes, irrespectively of being relational or not, show a free variation:

(19)  \textit{hrw sm3-t\beta}  \quad [\text{Sin B 192-193}]  \quad A B

‘the day of burial’

(20)  \textit{hrw n krs}  \quad [\text{Sin B 190-191}]  \quad A n B

‘the day of burial’

(21)  \textit{shrw jmjw-h\beta t}  \quad [\text{P.Priss 5,3}]  \quad A B

‘the councils/way of the ancestors’

(22)  \textit{shr n \textcircled{5}3\beta t}  \quad [\text{P.Priss 6,4}]  \quad A n B

‘the condition/conduct of many’

(23)  \textit{shr h\beta st}  \quad [\text{Semnah Despatch No.5 (9)}]  \quad A B

‘the condition of the desert’

(24)  \textit{pg3 3ht jmntt}  \quad [\text{Munich GL.EAF 35 (15)}]  \quad A B

‘the entrance of the western horizon’

(25)  \textit{pg3 n \textcircled{6}rryt}  \quad [\text{Peas B1 216}]  \quad A n B

‘the entrance of the portal’

(26)  \textit{jw\textcircled{7}t jt mwt=j}  \quad [\text{UrkVII 26.14}]  \quad A B

‘the inheritance of the father of my mother’

(27)  \textit{jw\textcircled{7}t nt jt=f}  \quad [\text{Hamm: official record (8)}]  \quad A n B

‘the inheritance of his father’
alienable possessed nouns can quite easily be attested in direct genitive

(28) $\text{hw}t \ s\text{n}nw=f$
\hspace*{1cm} [Dispute 106]
\hspace*{1cm} ‘his fellow’s things’

(29) $j\text{n}bw \ \text{h$k}3$
\hspace*{1cm} [Sin B 17]
\hspace*{1cm} ‘the walls of the ruler’

(30) $h^5w \ pr\text{-}n\text{sw}t$
\hspace*{1cm} [UrkVII 2.12]
\hspace*{1cm} ‘the furniture of the palace’

Spreading...

(31) $r \ \tch\text{b}\text{3}w=k$
\hspace*{1cm} [Sin B 196]
\hspace*{1cm} ‘the entrance of your altar’

(32) $r \ n \ \text{w}\text{c}bt=k$
\hspace*{1cm} [Sin AOS v17]
\hspace*{1cm} ‘the entrance of your tomb’

(33) $b\text{3}k \ \tch$
\hspace*{1cm} [Sin B 205]
\hspace*{1cm} ‘servant of the palace’

(34) $b\text{3}k \ n \ \text{c}h\text{t}$
\hspace*{1cm} [Sin AOS v21]
\hspace*{1cm} ‘servant of the palace’
Summary of results

- syntactic constraints must be combined with lexico-semantic aspects to account for the use and the distribution of classical Egyptian possessive constructions.

- indefinite and modified possessed nouns always appear in indirect genitives
  ⇒ the syntactic restriction of definiteness and strict adjacency hold for direct genitives the distribution is not complementary: free variation can be observed in non-restricted environments

- tendency for relational nouns to appear in direct genitive constructions
  - kinship terms
  - relational nouns of hierarchical type (e.g. lord, mistress, ruler, etc)
  - meronyms (e.g. end, limits, vicinity, shore of, etc)
  - descriptives (land, isle, town, people of, etc)
  - considerable inconsistency in many parts of the lexicon (body parts, inalienable personal qualities/state, temporal expressions, etc)
  - apparently unmotivated cases in both types of genitives

Proposal:
Direct genitives is the more archaic construction and as such, likely to be preserved with relational (inalienable) nouns. Indirect genitive, the innovative construction without syntactic or lexical restrictions, may spread onto all environments, but this change is gradual!

ME is a transitional stage of the language:
traces of an earlier stage with a syntactic split and proceeding toward an alienability split
References


Jespersen, Otto 1922. *Negation in English and Other Languages*. Copenhagen: Høst


