

LINGUA AEGYPTIA

JOURNAL OF EGYPTIAN LANGUAGE STUDIES

23

2015

Widmaier Verlag · Hamburg 2016

LINGUA AEGYPTIA – Journal of Egyptian Language Studies (LingAeg)

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Widmaier Verlag, Kai Widmaier, Witthof 23F, 22305 Hamburg, Germany (orders@widmaier-verlag.de).

www.widmaier-verlag.de

ISSN 0942-5659

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Dialects in Pre-Coptic Egyptian, with a Special Attention to Late Egyptian*

Jean Winand, Liège

Abstract

This paper considers two basic questions: 1) are there synchronic dialectal differences in the written material in pre-Coptic Egyptian?; 2) how can the dialectal hypothesis influence our reconstruction of the history of ancient Egyptian? In addition to the classic study of geographically conditioned variants, new strategies are considered for answering the first question as the By-Pass Hypothesis, the Sudden Death Paradox, and the Unexpected Resurrection Paradox. Taking the dialectal hypothesis seriously, it is suggested that the evolution of Egyptian did not follow a straightforward vertical line of succession (from OEg down to Coptic), but that dialects played a significant role in the transformation of Egyptian.

Key words

dialects, diachrony, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, Late Egyptian.

The question of dialects in pre-Coptic Egyptian periodically resurfaces in the specialized literature. At first glance, such a topic might look very specific, non-mainstream, and anecdotal in some way. In my view, it is consistent with what Egyptologists have been driving at: a better understanding of the written corpus that has come down to us. This paper will hopefully show how challenging and fascinating the study of dialects can be, and more importantly how it can significantly contribute to an improved understanding of the history of ancient Egyptian.

The question of dialects has haunted me from time to time, even back when I was engaged in writing my PhD in the eighties.¹ My attention had then been drawn on a particular distribution in the paradigm of the Future III, more specifically when a nominal subject was involved. Alongside the regular pattern *jrj* NP (*r*) *sdm*, which survived in

* This paper is a modified version of the Polotsky Memorial Lecture delivered in Jerusalem in November 2014. I here express my deep gratitude to Orly Goldwasser who generously invited me to give this lecture. I also warmly thank Stéphane Polis and Eitan Grossman for their helpful comments on a first draft of this paper, and the anonymous reviewer whose remarks contributed to achieve a better quality. In this paper, the traditional abbreviations OEg (Old Egyptian), MEG (Middle Egyptian), and LEg (Late Egyptian) have been systematically used.

1 The PhD was submitted in 1989, and later published in 1992 under the title *Études de néo-égyptien*. 1. *La morphologie verbale*.

most Coptic dialects (e.g. ⲉⲣⲉ-NP-ⲥⲱⲧⲏ in S), I noted a fair number of occurrences of *jw* NP *r sdm* attested in LEg texts whose southern origin could not be disputed. This variant can be viewed either as a continuation of the older pattern used in Earlier Egyptian (OEG and MEg), or as an analogical formation based on the widely attested LEg pattern with pronominal subject *jwz f r sdm*. Whatever the hypothesis one chooses, it is striking that Akhmimic (A) did not make any difference as regards the nature of the subject (ⲁ-ⲓ-ⲁ-ⲥⲱⲧⲏ vs. ⲁ-NP-ⲁ-ⲥⲱⲧⲏ).² They apparently continued the tradition observed in some Theban LEg documents; and they did it in a more radical way, as the possibility of having a distinct construction for nominal subject had by then been cancelled, which was not the case in LEg, where both patterns are attested in the South (for more details, see below). The explanation I suggested was that such isoglosses between these two sub-corpora could be described as dialectal variants.

Since the beginning of this new century, dialects are becoming increasingly fashionable, as they obligingly offer an easy way out to explain differences that resist the usual types of analysis. In his recent *Ancient Egyptian Language*, James Allen alludes many times to the possibility of a dialectal opposition to explain differences he observes in different fields of grammar (phonology, morphology, and syntax).³

This study tries to answer two basic questions: a) are there synchronic dialectal differences in the written material in pre-Coptic Egyptian?; 2) how can the dialectal hypothesis influence our reconstruction of the history of ancient Egyptian? The paper is structured as follows: the first section (§1) gives a quick résumé of the different points of view that have been adopted for assessing the corpus; I then consider the scholarly opinion about dialects in pre-Coptic Egyptian (§2), before discussing the definition of what is a dialect (as opposed to idiolect) in Egyptology (§3); my last preliminary methodological point deals with the different kinds of variants that can be found in a text, and their respective

2 As pointed out to me by a reviewer, L4 and L5 (there is a lack of evidence for L6) show ⲉⲣⲉ-NP-ⲥⲱⲧⲏ.

3 See statements like “Because dialectal variations undoubtedly existed throughout the history of the Egyptian language ...” (Allen 2013: 16); “The reality (i.e. the vocalic system) was undoubtedly complicated by dialectal and environmental (phonotactic) factors” (p. 41). See also p. 66 (“In any case, it is probable that *ʒ*, like *n* and *r*, had more than one phonological realization for most of its history, and that these were dialectal in origin”), p. 69 (“If so, its unquestionable Middle Kingdom value [ʔ], which it regularly maintained until Common Coptic, must be dialectal or the result of an historical development, or both.”), p. 69 (“The most that can be said is that the consonant originally represented a *[d/d] in at least some dialects of Egyptian and that it had become *[ʔ] in one or more dialects by the Middle Kingdom.”), p. 71 (“Together with the fact that *b* is never used to render Semitic *w*, these data indicate that the consonant was probably a stop, albeit with occasional – perhaps dialectal – pronunciation as a fricative”). See also, for phonology, p. 78, 82, 84 (“some early Middle Egyptian dialects”), p. 87–88 (general summary), for nominal morphology, p. 98, 99, n. 9, 104, 111, n. 28 (“the origin of this feature [i.e. object pronoun of the *tw*- type] is unknown; it may be partly dialectal”), 115 (compound nouns), 116 (vocalisation of the demonstratives), 124 (adjectival predicate with nouns), 134 (nominal predicate), 148 (formation of causatives), 164 (*yod prostheticum*), 167 (idem, with imperative), 175 (*sdmz f*), 179 (passive *sdmz f*), 208 (expression of the progressive by *sdmz f* and S-*hr*+inf.), 238 (on the status of Middle Egyptian vis-à-vis Old and Late Egyptian).

relevance to the issue discussed in this paper (§4). I then move to the core of my study: dialects in Late Egyptian (§5). After a brief introduction on the interest of dealing with this question (§5.1), I consider different strategies to reveal dialectal features. I first take the classical approach, which amounts to looking in synchrony for variants that can be distributed geographically (§5.2), before trying less common strategies (§5.3). The first one, already known in Egyptology, here called the By-Pass Hypothesis, examines how the existence of linguistic features common to two discontinuous phases of Egyptian, skipping the intermediary stage, might contribute to the reconstruction of Egyptian (§5.3.1). The second strategy – the Sudden Death Paradox – envisages patterns that were overwhelmingly present in LEg, but quite unexpectedly and rather quickly left the stage in Demotic (§5.3.2). The last strategy (§5.3.3) – actually the mirror of the preceding one – considers some features that were gradually and, as it seems, inexorably disappearing in LEg, but surprisingly experienced a second youth in Demotic, hence the nickname (Unexpected Resurrection Paradox). The last section (§6) discusses different – and non-exclusive – scenarios in the evolution of Egyptian where dialects influence can be felt, before reaching a final word of conclusion (§7).

1 Assessing the corpus

Over the past decades, one has made remarkable progresses in the way one understands the texts. The first step was – obviously enough – to organize the data chronologically. Even if this is not free of problematic cases (for instance, the literary pieces⁴ and, more generally, all the written production that is set within a tradition, like religious, royal or scientific writings), one has now gained some confidence in our ability of dating texts with the help of grammar and palaeography when the archaeological context is completely missing (that is in cases when there is no direct indication of date or reign, or of well-known individuals or securely dated historical events).⁵

One of the first models for reconstructing ancient Egyptian was Sethe's (1924), followed by Stricker's (1945), whose influence can still be felt nowadays. Sethe envisaged the succession of the main stages of Egyptian language as a straightforward, vertical line, with sudden breaks that he viewed as the consequences of the great political milestones that punctuated the Egyptian history (*"Kataklysmen-Theorie"*). Some twenty years later, Stricker introduced the idea that there was a distance or a gap between the written texts and the spoken reality. In his *Indeeling der Egyptische taalgeschiedenis*, he suggested that some forms of Egyptian could gradually lose touch with the living language, surviving only as a frozen idiom. But he stuck to the idea that the five major stages in the history of Egyptian followed each other in a straight genealogical relationship.

4 See most recently Stauder (2014) on the dating of the literary texts written in Classical Egyptian, and the proceedings of the Göttingen conference on the same topic (Moers et al. 2014).

5 See Winand (1995) on the possibility of using grammatical criteria for dating non-literary Late Egyptian texts.

Stricker's model was full of interesting insights that paved the way to another manner of studying Egyptian. Scholars became increasingly aware that synchrony is no synonym for homogeneity; there are differences – sometimes important ones – that must be accounted for by what one calls the textual genres, which show an extraordinary vitality and diversity throughout the history of Ancient Egypt.⁶ The issue of genres has been taken very seriously since the eighties.⁷ As a result, one is now able to pinpoint variations of registers within a single text or genre of texts.⁸

In some admittedly rare cases, one has succeeded in isolating traits that seem to belong to specific individuals.⁹ This new course in our studies opens interesting perspectives onto rhetoric and stylistics, two related domains that have been so far badly neglected.

In general linguistics, variation is traditionally approached along four axes or viewpoints (Polis forthcoming):

- the diachronic axis, or the time factor,
- the diastratic axis, or the social factor,
- the diaphasic axis, at the intersection of stylistics, rhetoric and pragmatics,
- the diatopic axis, or the regional, geographic factor, which is the topic of this paper.

In Coptic, scholars interested in linguistics never deal with Coptic in general, as it were a homogeneous entity, but prefer to focus on one dialect. It is thus a curious paradox that on the one hand, diachrony in pre-Coptic Egyptian has for some time been integrated as an important parameter in any linguistic study, whereas historic evolution within Coptic remains poorly understood,¹⁰ and, on the other hand, while dialects are pervasive in Coptic studies (sometimes leading to an extraordinary degree of refinement), the diatopic dimension is most often left out of the picture for the older stages of Egyptian.

6 The scholarly literature on the literary genres (and their relevance for linguistic studies) is now impressive in Egyptology. The major difference between literary and non-literary texts (whatever one chooses to put under these labels) was of course instrumental in the modern development of the Late Egyptian studies (Černý & Groll 1984: L–LI).

7 See Junge (1984). To this, one must link the concept of decorum as formulated by John Baines (Dorn, ed., forthcoming), with extensions towards other related concepts as tradition – be it productive or reproductive (Gillen & Polis, ed. forthcoming) –, and canonisation. See recently Brose (2014), Jurman (2015).

8 See, e.g., Goldwasser (1999, 2001), Winand & Gohy (2011).

9 See the forthcoming proceedings of the last Deir el-Medineh conference, held in Liège in November 2014.

10 But see, for instance, Grossman (2009), who approaches Coptic diachrony by studying the succeeding steps of the grammaticalization of the periphrastic perfect. In the conclusion, Grossman observes that “Coptic has its own diachronies, and these diachronies have their own relations with previous phases of pre-Coptic Egyptian. Paths of grammaticalization and other diachronic processes seem to ‘get lost’ after a certain phase of Egyptian, only to be resumed again in some – usually neglected – variety of Coptic.” This statement should be meditated by anyone trying to reconstruct the history of ancient Egyptian.

2 Dialects in pre-Coptic Egyptian: reality or fantasy?

In this section, I review some opinions about the (demonstrable) existence of dialects in pre-Coptic Egyptian. After a small introduction, I consider the scholarly opinion about how Coptic might be (or not be) used for assessing the existence of dialects in the previous stages (§2.1), before discussing some statements among Egyptologists about pre-Coptic Egyptian (§2.2), and dealing with some emic evidence (§2.3).

The existence of dialects in ancient Egypt has regularly been considered a question of common sense. The fact that Egypt is stretched over more than one thousand kilometres is for many scholars a proof in itself of the reality of dialects. This opinion was already expressed by F. Ll. Griffith in the beginning of the 20th century:

From earliest times Egypt must have been home of several dialects. It is so now that the language is Arabic: in ancient and more primitive times when communication was slower, the long course of the Nile valley, the Delta intersected and broken by rivers and marshes, the desert borders and Oases fostered dialect yet more

F. Ll. Griffith (1909: 183)

Griffith's remarks found a distant echo in more recent studies:¹¹

Die naheliegende Annahme, daß in einem Sprachraum, welcher sich in Nord-Süd-Richtung über eine Strecke von tausend kilometern und mehr ausdehnte, eine regionale Differenzierung vorhanden gewesen sein sollte, ist bereits früh geäußert worden.

Fr. Kammerzell (1998: 43)

As is well known, Egyptologists have thus far failed to pinpoint definite dialectal features in pre-Coptic Egyptian, although it is equally well known that these did exist. This is partly a matter of common sense – the geography of the Nile Valley and the relative isolation of the settlements must have encouraged dialectal variation – but the Egyptians themselves also left some tantalising references to this effect.

S. Uljas (2010: 374)

2.1 The evidence of Coptic

Scholars dealing with the question of dialects in pre-Coptic Egyptian often rely on this last stage in the evolution of Egyptian to build up their theories. First of all, the fact that Coptic seemingly gives undisputable evidence of the existence of dialects is seen as a

11 As already noted, this is also the opinion expressed by Allen (2013: 5) in his recently published study on Ancient Egyptian historical study: “Coptic shows evidence of six major dialects and numerous sub-dialects (...), and these *undoubtedly* (my italics [JW]) existed in some form in earlier stages of the language as well (...)”. Statements like these could of course find a strong support in modern Egypt where the dialectal diversity remains a fact, as demonstrated in full detail by Behnstedt & Woidich (1985–1988). See also the analysis of the typologist Greenberg (1986), who considers that there existed four main linguistic periods in ancient Egyptian, each grounded on a regional dialect.

strong asset. Till the eighties, the evidence in favour of a Coptic dialectology was mainly based on phonology:

By common consent the term “dialect” is used by Coptologists for those idioms whose originality, in relation to one another, is very strongly marked. The basis for judgement is, of course, on the lexical and morphosyntactical levels, but also and above all, using the most convenient and practical criterion, on the phonological level, through the number of phonemic oppositions, their quality, and the clarity of their representation in their respective orthographic systems. R. Kasser (1990b: 165)

This raised some suspicion among certain scholars (e.g. Hintze 1980). In a study published in 1982, Loprieno expressed the opinion that the differences in Coptic phonology should rather be explained as graphemic variants, which might in some cases be correlated with phonetic (not phonologic) variations.¹² For Loprieno (1982: 79), the very small differences one can spot here and there should not prevent us from considering Coptic as a single language:

Es muß wohl der Existenz einer nationalen Sprache zugeschrieben werden, die aufgrund der politisch und kulturell höchst zentralistischen Struktur des Landes zu jeder Zeit als einheitlich auftritt. Das gilt durchaus auch für das Koptische: Phonologisch, morphologisch und syntaktisch handelt es sich um eine Sprache, deren zahlreiche ‚dialectales‘ in keiner Hinsicht als autonome Sprachsysteme betrachtet werden dürfen.

Loprieno’s opinion has two major consequences: first, as regards the synchrony of Coptic, differences one observed in the spellings bear witness only to different scribal traditions, and second, any attempt to correlate the supposed dialectal situation of Coptic with earlier phases of Egyptian cannot yield any result.¹³

More recently, and from a different perspective, Shisha-Halevy (2007: 25, n. 28) stated his scepticism about our ability to produce the evidence needed to assess the dialectal variety in pre-Coptic Egyptian:

Discovering the Coptic dialects in Egyptian – a long-standing ambition among Egyptian linguists, is, in the present state of our knowledge, *a hopeless task*, especially because of the problematic vowelless graphematic representation, but also because the puzzle of Coptic dialects, with “new” dialects emerging almost yearly, is only in part (if at all) geographically assignable, with sociolinguistic and other factors wholly unapproachable for early Egypt.

12 See Loprieno (1982: 81) “*Die koptischen Dialekte sind keine autonomen linguistischen Systeme, sondern im Grunde Schreibtraditionen*”.

13 Loprieno came back to this issue more recently (2006: 165–170), once more stating that he views the term dialect “hopelessly inadequate when describing Egyptian linguistic reality”. Considering the particular situation of the community of Deir el-Medineh, he adds: “As a general observation we can say that in a society with restricted, or perhaps better with ‘contingent’ literacy such as greater Deir el-Medina, some of the features which we would usually tend to attribute to ‘dialects’ turn out to be more frequently features of ‘idiolects’ which characterize a specific set of documents or as an individual scribe.”

This pessimistic view thus contrasts with Kasser's opinion (1984), who, in response to Loprieno's 1982 article, prefers to stay on the optimistic side, following the path open by Vergote seventy years ago. One should expect, so Kasser (1984: 440–441), that the adoption of a totally new orthographical standard by the scribes completely free of any tradition or convention was very close to a phonetic transcription:

Bien plus vraisemblable nous paraît au contraire, et tous comptes faits, l'hypothèse selon laquelle, en Égypte comme dans de nombreux autres pays dont les phénomènes linguistiques peuvent être observés encore aujourd'hui, il s'est produit en coordination normale les deux phénomènes suivants : d'une part et d'abord, *pluralité de dialectes* (peu différenciés les uns des autres, nous en convenons) ; d'autre part et ensuite (le premier phénomène continuant alors à durer et devenant simultané par rapport au second), quand ces dialectes (surtout régionaux mais peut-être aussi sociaux) sont parvenus à un stade littéraire (parfois fort éphémère, et provoqué en fonction des besoins correspondant à une situation temporaire donnée), *rendement orthographique de ces dialectes selon un système graphico-phonologique unifié* (ou presque), tendant précisément à mettre en évidence les différences phonologiques dialectales.

The overall importance commonly given to phonology can also be explained by the widespread opinion in the greater part of the second half of the last century that differences occasionally found in morphology, syntax or lexicon are insignificant, as expressed, *inter alios*, by Osing (1984: 1074).¹⁴ In contrast to this, the input of the last two decades of the 20th century scholarship, and of the beginning of the 21st century, has been to move beyond phonology to reach other fields of linguistic description. For instance, Kasser (1990a: 186), while still emphasizing the right of phonology to claim a special status of *primus inter pares*, also firmly expresses his belief in the substantial profit that could be gained from a close analysis of the lexicon and the morpho-syntax:¹⁵

Les dialectes coptes (y compris leurs principaux subdialectes) ont été étudiés jusqu'ici presque toujours sur le plan de la phonologie (considérée comme suffisamment connue par leur orthographe) : priorité rendue légitime par les nécessités pratiques, puisque là, même des fragments de textes relativement petits peuvent être classés avec un degré de certitude acceptable. Cependant, on a répété avec raison que l'analyse interdialectale ne pouvait être réduite à une approche orthographico-phonologique. Chaque fois

14 See also Satzinger's comments (1990: 416) à propos the prehistory of Coptic dialects: "What I want to show is, in the main, that the prehistory of the Coptic dialects can be based on historical phonology only. Structural analysis of Coptic phonology is an indispensable tool for this task, but it cannot, by its very nature, yield historical results". Satzinger (1986) also discussed the origin of the Sahidic dialect in a previous study, going back to the Persian period.

15 This opinion is only partly shared by Hintze, who wrote (1984: 414) "Die Unterschiede zwischen Dialekten beruhen vor allem auf phonologischen Besonderheiten", adding in a footnote (fn. 4) "Demgegenüber treten Unterschiede in der Morphologie, Syntax oder Lexik als sekundär stark zurück. Wenn derartige Unterschiede einen größeren Spielraum einnehmen, so entwickeln sich die Dialekte zu selbständigen Sprachen". This of course raises the all-important issue of how to define a dialect (see *infra* 1.4).

que c'est possible, elle doit s'étendre aussi aux domaines de la lexicologie et de la morphosyntaxe.

In the realm of morphology, several studies by Funk (1984, 1985, 1986) have made it clear that there are tangible differences in Coptic that cannot be reduced to mere divergent orthographic traditions among the scribal schools. In his presentation for the *Coptic Encyclopaedia* (1990), he argues that the distribution of the Coptic dialects one can achieve significantly varies according to the viewpoint one chooses to privilege (phonology *vs.* morphology). As regards the lexicon, there seems to be very promising avenues for future research, but the field is still rather neglected, a characteristics that the Coptic studies unfortunately share with the older stages of Ancient Egyptian.¹⁶ In a recent contribution on a limited sub-corpus (the *Book of Jeremiah*), Feder suggested that a close look at lexical differences might contribute to the general study of Coptic dialectology.¹⁷

Während die koptologische Forschung in jüngerer Zeit zu einer immer subtileren Differenzierung der koptischen Dialekte in 'Sprache' (S und B), Dialekte, Subdialekte, Mesodialekte, Metadialekte und Protodialekte gekommen ist, um diese dann wider in sechs Gruppen unter einem "chief of the group" zusammenzuführen (Achmimisch, Lykopolitanisch, Sahidisch, Mesokemisch [Mittelägyptisch, auch Oxyrhynchisch], Fajjumisch und Bohairisch), steht ihre lexikologische Untersuchung (die Möglichkeit der Differenzierung der Dialekte durch ihre lexikalischen Besonderheiten) immer noch aus.

2.2 A sample of opinions among Egyptologists about pre-Coptic Egyptian

Egyptologists have accepted the idea of the presence of dialects in pre-Coptic Egypt at least since the last quarter of the 19th century, as witnessed in a study by Baillet (1883:42) on the language of the two Ptolemaic temple decrees of Canopus and Memphis:¹⁸

Étudiant un ensemble respectable de documents je pourrai en tirer des conclusions non moins assurées que celles que M. Natalis de Wailly et G. Raynaud ont établies pour les dialectes de Lorraine et d'Artois, d'après les chartes de Joinville, de la ville d'Aire ou du Ponthieu. Mais je pense dès à présent que j'ai rencontré dans ces deux seuls textes une quantité de faits philologiques et grammaticaux qui ne permettent pas de nier l'existence de deux dialectes, à Thèbes et à Memphis, dès le temps des Ptolémées.

16 Cf. Winand, *Building Bridges (preliminary steps towards a new dictionary of Ancient Egyptian)*, lecture given at the occasion of the award ceremony for the Anneliese Maier Price 2015 (Alexander von Humboldt Foundation), in Leipzig (September, 16, 2015), and Winand, *A new dictionary of Ancient Egyptian*, Lecture given at the plenary session of the XIth ICE, Florence, 30 August 2015. One must here mention the systematic indication of the regional provenance in Hannig's dictionary volumes, which could be of the greatest help to find out differences.

17 See below, for a more detailed assessment of what can be done in contrastive lexicology.

18 This study was preceded the year before by another one on the same topic by the same Baillet (1882), which prompted a handwritten memoir by K. Piehl (1882) *à propos* pHarris I, dedicated to Baillet, which thus seems to be the first study dealing with dialects in LEg. I thank Å. Engsheden to whom I am indebted for a copy of the text.

In his reconstruction of the historical development of Ancient Egyptian, Sethe (1924) made no place for dialects. He was aware of some non-linear evolutions, some apparent breaks between OEg and LEg, as for instance the agreement in gender and number of the copula in the nominal predication. For him, the main division was between some kind of vernacular spoken language and forms of literary written language. The evolution of the former one was continuous, uninterrupted, while the latter ones ended up into frozen stages that were gradually losing touch with the living idiom. In this reconstruction, there was no need to introduce any kind of dialectal diversity.

Building upon some remarks already made by Sethe (intermittent agreement in gender and number of the copula in the nominal predication, and intermittent presence of the *yod prostheticum* with some verbal tenses), Edgerton (1951) was the first to suggest that the common grammatical features one could observe in OEg and LEg, but were ignored in MEg, were possible isoglosses revealing a common geographical origin for these two stages of Egyptian. In other words, OEg and LEg were the written manifestations of a common dialect (1951: 9–12):

If Old, Middle, and Late Egyptian represent successive stages in the development of a single dialect, than three apparently unrelated changes must have occurred between Old and Middle Egyptian and these same three changes must have been exactly reversed between Middle and Late Egyptian. Doubtless that is possible, but it is also possible that Old and Late Egyptian represent the speech of adjacent parts of Egypt while Middle Egyptian may represent a different and perhaps distant part.

In spite of occasional scepticism,¹⁹ the idea that regional variants could influence the development of national languages seems to be widely accepted, even if they are according to Allen's opinion nearly invisible.²⁰ The following statement by Osing is typical of the *communis opinio*:²¹

19 Loprieno (1982: 75): "Es gibt Vertreter der Theorie, wonach regional unterschiedliche linguistische Erscheinungen die ägyptische Sprachentwicklung beeinflusst hätten, und entschiedene Gegner dieser Theorie, die behaupten, die Geschichte der ägyptischen Sprache sei eher durch kulturelle Ereignisse als durch geolinguistische Änderungen geprägt worden."

20 Allen (2013: 5–6): "Dialectal distinctions are generally invisible in pre-Coptic writing. Morphological and grammatical features, however, indicate that Old and Late Egyptian are historical phases of a single dialect, or closely related ones, probably from the north, while Middle Egyptian represents a separate dialect, most likely southern in origin. In the history of the language, therefore, Middle Egyptian somewhat interrupts and obscures the presumably direct evolution of Old Egyptian into Late Egyptian." On the difficulty (impossibility?) of assessing the existence of regional dialects, see Loprieno (1982: 76–77): „Es ist unbestreitbar, dass in einem derartig ausgedehnten sprachlichen Raum regionale Varianten bestanden, die das gegenseitige Verständnis verhindern konnten; aber die Breite dieser Unterschiede lässt sich ‚wissenschaftlich‘ nicht abschätzen. (...) Die pharaonische Tradition bietet m.W. keinen linguistisch verwendbaren Beleg, der uns helfen könnte, geographisch Besonderheiten synchronistisch (...) festzustellen.“

21 Osing (1984: 1074).

Neben den jeweils als Schrift- und Hochsprache normierten Sprachstufen des Alt-, Mittel- und Neuägyptischen sowie des Demotischen haben in Äg. sicherlich seit ältester Zeit und in weit größerem Umfang, als dies gelegentlich in der geschriebenen Sprache zum Ausdruck kommt, **verschiedene Soziolekte** bestimmter Bevölkerungsgruppen (nach Stand, Beruf, Geschlecht u. Alter unterschieden) und **regional begrenzte Dialektformen** existiert, die ihrerseits in Auseinandersetzung mit der Hochsprache die Form der über diese Grenzen hinaus verstandenen allgemeinen Umgangssprache bestimmt haben dürften.

Very recently, Gundacker (2010) comprehensively argued that differences in how the pronominal subject is expressed in some proper names and in the interrogative pattern might be explained along dialectal lines. The pattern interrogative pronoun – dependent pronoun that is attested in Old Egyptian, but fell into oblivion in Middle Egyptian, is interpreted as a feature of the dialect that was the regional substrate of OEg. According to Gundacker any stage in the development of Egyptian had its roots in some regional dialect; he also suggests that the emergence of a new stage of written Egyptian was more or less conditioned or linked to political changes, a view that was first expressed by Sethe (see above).

Several studies have been devoted to the issue of dialects in relation to specific stages of ancient Egyptian.²² For Earlier Egyptian, since the pioneering paper of Edgerton in 1951, scholars periodically showed some interest for this question.²³

For LEg,²⁴ S.I. Groll devoted three papers to individual LEg texts where she thought traces of dialects could be traced back. In her first study, she unconvincingly argued that pAdoption could be analysed as a witness of what she called the Spermeru dialect

22 I only here mention in passing the Nubian variety of Egyptian that was in use in the first millennium BC. It seems to follow the rules of (late) Late Egyptian, with some developments of its own, for instance in the personal pronouns, and in the conjugation system. It has been called a dialect, but probably not appropriately since this variety of Egyptian was never spoken as a living language (see Peust 1999). See also Breyer (2008), who prefers to categorize Napatan as a creole language.

23 In addition to the studies of Gundacker (2010) and Allen (2013) already mentioned, add Roquet (1979), who studied some uncommon spellings revealing phonological changes that could be related to some dialectal variation in OEg, Allen (2004) on the dialectal features appearing in the Middle Kingdom versions of the *Pyramid Texts*, Uljas (2010), on the spelling *ꜥs* (instead of *ꜥsn*) of the 3rd pl. suf. pr. that can be assigned to a regional variety of MEg. At the last International Congress of Egyptologists in Florence (2015), Kupreyev presented a paper on the evolution of demonstratives from OEg to LEg, which persuasively gives some support to a Lower Egypt provenance of LEg. And, finally, Gundacker had a paper at the last “Crossroads” conference (Berlin 17–20 February 2016) on the role of toponyms and other geographically bound expressions for assessing the dialects in Early Egyptian.

24 For the record, add a short note by Vycichl (1958). The propositions made by V. Davis (1973) on the dialectal origin of some LEg negations have immediately been faced with scepticism (see Eyre 1975), and will not be discussed here. For a recent discussion, see el-Hamrawi (2007). In a very interesting paper, Goldwasser (2001) discussed some grammatical and lexical varieties of what is called the 19th dyn. non-literary dialect Late Egyptian, elaborating upon a previous study where she used the terms low and high dialects (Goldwasser 1999); I prefer in this case to speak of differences of registers (see *infra*).

(Groll 1984).²⁵ In another paper, there is an attempt to isolate a so-called Kuban dialect by assigning different properties to six different patterns of *sdm.nzf*, which seems difficult to accept (Groll 1987). Finally, in a paper devoted to a translation (with some commentaries) of pAnastasi VIII, the author suggests, without giving much comment, that traces of different dialects (in the Delta and the Theban area) can be detected (Groll 1998).

In a seminal study, Kruchten (1999) reviewed the evidence for explaining the transition from Middle Egyptian to Late Egyptian: he mainly focused on the increasing use of *jrj*-auxiliated constructions and on the development of non-initial *jw*'s. In his view, the emergence of LEg did not result from a long and hidden process, nor could it be the consequence of a change of dialect to be connected to some political process during the 18th dynasty.

In a very suggestive paper, Peust (2007) showed that the two common verbs of motion *hn* and *šm* (and to a lesser extent *nʿj*) were in complementary distribution. He also noted several details that could point to some dialectal distribution in LEg.²⁶

I myself have also come across various issues dealing with dialects in LEg. As mentioned in the opening section of this paper, I tried to show that the variance between *jrj* NP (*r*) *sdm* and *jw* NP *r sdm* in future III could be explained as dialectal (Winand 1992).²⁷ In a short note on *Wenamun*, I suggested that the unexpected construction *ntj* + past converter found in 2,27 was consistent with what would be later found in the southern Coptic dialects (Winand 2007). For the last Deir el-Medineh conference (Liège, 2014), I discussed the difference between dialect and idio-/sociolect. I collected a large sample of data in support of dialectal differentiation in phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon (Winand forthcoming b). Finally, in a paper that was presented at the conference in Leipzig on lexical borrowing in 2010, I discussed some words well attested in OEg and LEg, but virtually absent in MEg. I suggested that the gap in our documentation was not accidental, but could give a new support to Edgerton's hypothesis that OEg and LEg have a common regional origin (Winand forthcoming a).

As regards Demotic, Klasens, in an unpublished study mentioned by Vergote (1961) sounded rather optimistic in a general way about the possibility of isolating dialectal features in pre-Roman (i.e., Persian and Ptolemaic) Demotic.²⁸ More precisely, Johnson (1976:

25 First, the pattern *ʿhʿ.n stpʿf* formation should be analysed as an emphatic formation, which is rather dubious; second, the pattern *iw:f hr tm sdm* should be interpreted as the negative counterpart of the circumstantial first present, which is highly debatable. Groll views the sequential in a rather rigid way (p. 59) stating that if there is no further step in the narrative, it must be a circumstantial. This of course does not take into account the elaboration function of the sequential (see Winand 2000; see also Winand 2014b and 2015); third, the use of the Future III with a predicate other than an infinitive was unknown, so Groll, in the Theban dialect, which is contradicted by the available evidence (see Winand 1996a); and finally, the 3rd p. pl. subject to mark the 'passive' was not used in Thebes according to Groll, although there is ample evidence of it in the *LRL* and in the *GTR* corpus.

26 For complementary information on this distribution, more particularly the case of the imperative, see Winand (forthcoming b).

27 Add now the relevant discussion by Vernus (2014, esp. on p. 220–225) about the *Wisdom of Amenemope*, whose composition can be connected to the region of Akhmim.

28 Add an interesting paper by Quaegebeur (1974) showing the interest of closely studying the Greek transcriptions of Egyptian proper names in relation to dialectal distribution in Coptic. The first

105–106) argued that Magical London-Leiden papyrus shared numerous features with genuine Theban documents, and thus must be considered as representing the Theban dialect.

This assumption (*i.e.* that Magical was written in Thebes) can be tested in two ways. First, the orthography, morphology, and grammar of Magical can be compared with those of a contemporary manuscript known to have been written in Thebes. Second, the dialect in which Magical was written can be compared with the known dialects of Coptic, especially that of Thebes. Both approaches confirm that Magical was written in Thebes by a scribe using the Theban dialect.

Almost twenty years later, in a paper based on the study of loanwords in Demotic, Ray (1994: 260) comes to the conclusion that Demotic did not represent the spoken language of these times, e.g. in the way it ignores all traces of dialect, noting flatly “The Rosetta stone describes Demotic as *sḥṭ* – epistolographic – which seems an apt description”:

In common with every earlier stage of written Egyptian, Demotic ignores almost all traces of dialect. This was partly because dialect differences lay in the vowels, and Egyptian writing dispenses with these.

before conceding:

But there were presumably other traits that could have been written if scribes had wanted to: one such is the plural of the conjunctive, where Saidic has *ḥcε* but other dialects the more traditional *ḥtōy*. With one late exception, Demotic regularly writes the latter form *mtw-w*. One such distinction does come through in certain texts, where the feminine ending of infinitives is lost in some northern dialects before a suffix, but kept in the South. Thus the Hor archive and the Rosetta Stone write *iw.w ms-f* instead of the Upper-Egyptian *iw.w mst-f*, a change which is reflected in later Coptic. The former scribe, who came from Sebennytos, writes *in.w-y* for *in.w-t(y)* “they brought me”.

2.3 The emic evidence

The existence of regional differences seem to be supported by some admittedly scarce emic evidence, whose best witness remains a well-known passage of pAnastasi I,²⁹ even if its interpretations cannot be reduced to the issue discussed here. The text opposes a well-educated scribe from the capital to a junior colleague who stays abroad with the army. The senior official continuously mocks his colleague for not being up to his task. At one point, he says that his style is pure gibberish, completely unintelligible. And he makes a comparison with a fictive dialogue between a man from the North and a man from the South:³⁰

study on dialects in Demotic seems to be Lexa's (1934).

29 The text is already quoted by Piehl in his memoir on the dialects in pHarris I (Piehl 1882: 1).

30 The passage of pAnastasi I is somehow reminiscent of a famous passage of *Sinuhe* B 224–226 (“it was like to be in a dream, like when a man of the marshes sees himself in Elephantine, a man of the Delta in Nubia”). In the latter case, the text can be better explained by referring to differences in socio-cultural sensitivity, rather than by dialectal variations.

n3yʔk sdd šhw.t hr ns.tʔj mn hr-tp sp.tʔj
 jwʔw thth m sdm
 bn ʔʕ whʕʔf st
 st mj md.t n z jdhw hnʕ z n ʔbw

“Your words are regrouped on my tongue and remained fixed on my lips. They are so confused when heard than there is no interpreter who can explain them. They are like a conversation between a man of the Delta and a man of Elephantine”
 (pAnastasi I, 28,5-6)

One can also bring into the discussion a passage of Flavius Josephus, where the Jewish author tries to explain the etymology of the name Hyksos. His analysis rather points to a difference of register (*lingua sacra* vs. *lingua communis* or *vulgaris*) than to a difference of dialects:

ἐκαλεῖτο δὲ τὸ σύμπαν αὐτῶν ἔθνος Ὑκσῶς, τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν βασιλεῖς ποιμένες. Τὸ γὰρ υκ καθ’ ἱερὰν γλῶσσαν βασιλέα σημαίνει, τὸ δὲ σῶς ποιμὴν ἐστὶ καὶ ποιμένες κατὰ τὴν κοινὴν διάλεκτον, καὶ οὕτως συντιθέμενον γίνεται Ὑκσῶς.

“Their whole people was named Hyksos, that is Kings Shepherds. In fact, in the sacred language υκ means king, while σῶς is shepherd or shepherds in the common language, and thus once put together, one gets Hyksos”

(Flavius Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, I, 14, § 82)³¹

3 What is a dialect?

Before going further, it is important to clarify some key concepts. To be sure, the definition of what is a dialect remains largely impressionistic in Egyptology.³² The term ‘dialect’ is usually left undefined, which probably presupposes that everyone intuitively knows what it means. When scholars volunteer to give a definition, they seem happy to state that the word “dialect”, for the sake of simplicity, has been taken in the traditional sense,

31 Immediately after, Josephus suggests another explanation, more convincing as he says: the first element *hyk* would be linked to an Egyptian word meaning “captive”, hence “captive kings”. On this, see the commentary of Loprieno (2001: 100).

32 This finds some distant echoes in the general literature where it is largely acknowledged that the definition of dialects by nature will always have a part of subjectivity. This can easily lead to a complete dismissal of the problem, a position one can see in the following statement made by Ross (2003: 177) for a collective volume on *Motives for Language Change*: “It is a linguistic truism that there is no sharp boundary between the concepts of ‘a language’ and ‘a dialect’, and one can dodge the terminological problem by referring to both simply as ‘lects’ and to speakers who speak two or more lects as ‘polylectal’ in that they vary their speech according to interlocutor and speech situation, but these speakers know that they only speak English. The term ‘polylectal’ is reserved here for speakers who are aware that the linguistic repertoire they carry in their heads consists of two or more separate lects for which in many cases they will have separate names.” See also Klinkenberg (1994: 34–38) à propos the Roman languages, who makes a distinction between three uses of the term ‘dialect’: dialect (1) for any geographically based diversification of a language, dialect (2) for any product of a diversification from an older stage of a language, and dialect (3), in its sociological sense, refers to any linguistic variety subordinated to a language that passes for standard.

“traditional” referring here to what is usually done in Coptic studies, not in dialectology at a more general level.

In his highly valuable paper on the Subakhmimic dialects (1985), Funk starts from a common sense definition of the word dialect, before asserting that the features required to justify the term ‘dialect’ “cannot be established in a theoretical way or with general validity”. His conclusions, which should be meditated upon, are worth citing *in toto* (1982: 136):

Before I conclude, I wish to make some brief remarks on the use (i.e. both the ‘proper use’ and the problem of usefulness) of the term ‘dialect’, though I cannot discuss the notion of dialect here in any detail. Let us simply assume that the term ‘dialect’ may be taken to cover any variety of speech usage, oral or written, which is shared by a community of speakers and differs from other varieties in a number of ways (which can be represented by means of distinctive features). What kinds of features are required to justify the application of the term ‘dialect’, or which proportion between common and distinctive features, cannot be established in a theoretical way or with general validity. Rather, it is a practical matter of how to handle the linguistic phenomena one is concerned with in an appropriate manner. Thus it largely depends on the purpose. But on the other hand, it certainly depends on the amount of factual information that can be put into the notion of one particular dialect named X or Y or Z. In my view, it is precisely this question that ought to be given much more consideration than it used to be given in the study of Coptic: How strong, or how informative, are statements such as, ‘This form is peculiar to dialect X’, or ‘In dialect Y this would appear in such-and-such a form’. My claim is that, if we stick to the traditional notion of there being one Subakhmimic dialect, then the amount of information supplied by such statements is indeed next to nothing.

As has been repeatedly stated, the difference between dialects and standardized (viz. national) language can be approached from two perspectives: a linguistic one, and a socio-political one. The latter one is probably the easiest one to understand. For some political reason, a dialect, that is a “lect” used as a regional variant, can be promoted to the status of national language. This is what happened to Sahidic, and later to Bohairic, which achieved supra-regional status. If one considers dialects from a purely linguistic perspective, one can say that they are related to a national (or a supra-regional) idiom with some implied inter-intelligibility. This of course does not presuppose that there is a mutual understanding between dialects belonging to the same linguistic group, as shown for instance by the Arabic dialects stretched from Morocco to Syria.

Generally speaking, the problem one is faced with when dealing with dialects is not very different from any issue that has to cope with the problem of limits, or from any domain that would be better defined as a continuum, rather than as made of discrete categories. For instance, one can endlessly discuss – and this has of course been done – on the limits between Late Egyptian and Demotic,³³ or between Middle Egyptian and Late Egyptian.

33 See for instance the discussions on the place of pVandier: late Late Egyptian or early Demotic (Shisha-Halevy 1989, Quack 1995).

tian. Interesting as it might seem from a purely theoretical viewpoint, it can very quickly lead nowhere at a more practical level. For better-known languages than Egyptian, one can resort to dialectometry/dialectometrics for calculating the degree of variance between dialects (Goebel 1982).³⁴ As is well known, the transition between two geographically close dialects is gradual, never abrupt.

Some linguistic varieties are better explained as manifestations of sociolects or idiolects.³⁵ Sociolect and idiolect basically refer to the same point of view: linguistic differentiations according to social classes, everything else being equal (time, place, literary genres and registers). What distinguishes the two terms is a matter of quantification: whereas sociolect points to a class of individuals that share some properties (age, gender, occupation, etc.), idiolect, as the name implies, deals with the habit of one particular, or of a handful of persons (prototypically, a family).

4 Handling the variants

My main purpose is to find a way of handling variants. There are lots of variants: variants of spelling, variants bearing on phonology, morphology, syntax or lexicon. Statistics, however difficult it might be in Egyptology, can often play a decisive role in this respect: our perception of a variant will of course be different whether it remains isolated or happens to be found many times.

In pondering the variants, one can make, as it seems, the following distinctions:

- a variant, obviously enough, can be *a mistake made by the scribe*; this could of course be the topic for another paper, if not a whole cycle of conferences, how we, Egyptologists, did in the past, or do in the present handle scribal mistakes, the real ones, but also the pseudo-mistakes, and the non-existent mistakes that are but the witnesses of our own ignorance;
- a variant can be *a mark of style*, if it does not affect the linguistic system; once again, one can easily see the relevance of such a category at a theoretical level, but this remains difficult to deal with in Egyptology due to our lack of understanding all the refinements of language;³⁶
- a variant can be, at the writing level, *a particular way of spelling some words*, something I'd like to label an idiograph (on the model of idiolect);
- a variant may *reveal an idiolect* if it teams up with other features in a corpus of closely related texts. It is probably useless to make here any distinction as to whether

34 See the “Dialektometrie Projekt” run by the University of Salzburg on the Roman languages (<http://www.dialectometry.com>).

35 As already stated (fn 24), the use of the term ‘dialect’ in Orly Goldwasser otherwise most interesting papers (1999 and 2001), is debatable, for the discussion focuses on issues related to genres, registers, and sociolects.

36 Consider, for instance, what remains to be done for appreciating the differences found in the word order.

the term idiolect applies to a single individual or a small group bound together by some social links (usually family, religious or professional ties);

- a variant can be *the sign of a dialect*, if it is part of a larger set of variants, ideally of different kinds (phonological, morphological, and syntactical ones), in a larger corpus with some historical depth. As regards Egyptian, this diachronic dimension can sometimes be checked against other stages of the language, but this does not absolutely need to be so from an epistemological viewpoint, as dialects do not necessarily survive for centuries, at least in writing;
- finally a variant can mark *a step in the evolution of the linguistic system*: a variant A may represent a transitory stage if it is new (that is opposed to an older form B), and if A ends up by overtaking the positions of B in the considered corpus.

As is widely known, one has now reached a kind of extreme refinement in Coptic dialectology with the introduction of terms like dialects, protodialects, metadialects, mesodialects, subdialects and ‘dialecticules’ (Kasser 1990: 189). The following figure illustrates the different possibilities (personal reconstruction inspired by Kasser’s papers):

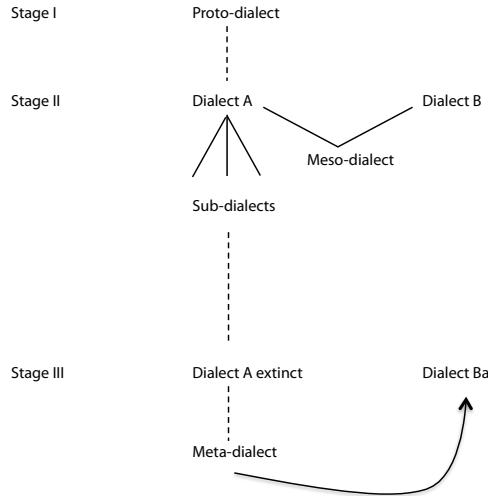


Fig. 1. Subdivisions of and relations between dialects (invented stemma)

My personal ambition is obviously more limited. I would feel very happy if some sensible answers could be found to the following simple questions:

- are pre-Coptic dialects, which were undoubtedly a reality of the spoken language, observable in the written documentation?,
- what can the dialect hypothesis tell us about the history of Egyptian?

In the following, I shall suggest some possible paths of research taking Late Egyptian as my corpus of reference.

5 Dialects in Late Egyptian

5.1 Preliminary word

In the history of Egyptian, Late Egyptian can be considered a major player for many reasons: 1) when compared to OEg and MEg, the LEg corpus is more substantial; 2) when compared to OEg (and MEg), the LEg corpus is geographically better balanced, as regards the non-literary texts, even if the situation remains far from an ideal one (see below); 3) when compared to OEg, the diversity of genres (and repertoires) is greater in LEg; 4) when compared to Demotic, there is a better understanding of the functioning of LEg as a linguistic system; 5) when compared to OEg, MEg and Demotic, one definitely has better tools (i.e. electronic databases) in LEg for having access to the texts, for searching and testing hypotheses.

Late Egyptian also has a pivotal role in the evolution of Egyptian, being at the juncture of Earlier Egyptian (Old and Middle Egyptian) and Later Egyptian (Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic).

The claim that is made here is that traces of dialects can actually be found in Late Egyptian. Most often, due to the nature of the corpus, one cannot go further than suggesting a basic distinction between North and South. Probably one of the most formidable obstacles for building a strong case – besides the hieroglyphic system itself (see below) – remains the constitution of the LEg corpus. As has already been pointed out many times, the corpus is geographically unevenly balanced, with a strong statistical bias in favour of the South, namely the DeM area, *sensu lato*.³⁷ Moreover asserting the geographical provenance remains problematic for many texts, and even when it is possible, one is still faced with the difficult question of equating the geographical provenance of a document with the place of its creation. While mobility is often seen as a distinguished mark of our modern societies, it was a reality in Ancient Egypt as well: scribes, officials, priests, army members, artisans did not spend their lives in one single place.³⁸ Quite to the contrary! One can see them travelling a lot, in Egypt and abroad, sent for temporary missions or longer term assignments. This means that there is every possibility for a text written in Thebes and found in Thebes, to have been written by a scribe who was educated, for instance, in Memphis, or for a text found somewhere to have been written elsewhere and carried by his owner while on duty. For all these reasons, the evidence one is able to produce must always be pondered against its possible dependence upon some previous tradition, regardless the geographical provenance.






The issue of dialects has many exciting aspects; one of them is that it forces scholars to be imaginative, to invent new strategies. The most direct strategy, as can be easily guessed, is to look for variants that can be distributed geographically in a meaningful way.

In dialectal studies, discovering phonological isoglosses has always been the touchstone *par excellence*; this of course remains the basic criterion to categorize the Coptic dialects as well.³⁹ Understandably enough, phonetics will never be the best playing field for testing

37 According to the Ramses database, approximately 10% of the data can be given a Northern origin.

38 On mobility in ancient Egypt (within and outside Egypt), see, e.g. Baines (2007), Köpp-Junk (2014).

39 See above Kasser's opinion.

the dialectal hypothesis in pre-Coptic Egyptian; to say the least, hieroglyphic writing has never been very cooperative in this respect. A very common word like *sn.t* “sister” was continuously written , its phonetic changes (down to Coptic *ⲥⲟⲛⲉ* /so:ne/) remaining completely hidden in the hieroglyphic system. Phonetic variations as shown in Coptic *ⲣⲁⲛ* (SBO), *ⲣⲓⲛ* (S), *ⲣⲉⲛ* ALFO, and *ⲕⲉⲛ* (F) for Egyptian *rn* “name” have no chance to ever materialize with hieroglyphs. Fortunately, historical changes are sometimes recorded in spelling, as the depalatalization of some dental stops ( > , cf. *ⲱⲧⲡⲓ* “load”) or the lost of the intervocalic *ʒ* in 3-lit. verbs ( > , cf. *ⲥⲱⲃ* “send”).

Morphology and syntax offer promising but still badly neglected perspectives for studying variation. Finally, as was already stressed by some scholars, variations in lexicon can also provide fresh insights to the issue under discussion, but this once again brings to the fore the crucial need of up-to-date lexical tools.⁴⁰ Using lexicon for comparison is never a simple matter, for it unfortunately cannot suffice to compare lists of words: the preliminary step is a deep semantic analysis of individual words and the understanding of their relationships within the semantic network(s) they belong to.

In the following, I shall use different strategies to review the evidence: I first consider what I here call the classic strategy (§6), that is, to look for differences in synchrony. I then move to not-so-classic strategies that could hopefully bring some interesting insights to the issue of dialects (§7). The first one, following Edgerton’s seminal paper, is here called the By-Pass Hypothesis (§7.1). I will finally consider two opposite phenomena that seem to be counter-intuitive from a diachronic perspective: they are here dubbed the Sudden Death Paradox (§7.2) and the Unexpected Resurrection Paradox (§7.3).

5.2 The classic strategy


The first strategy amounts to looking in synchrony for variants that can be distributed geographically. This is more or less what is commonly done in Coptic. Two options are equally open.


- The first one, which is of course the most attractive, consists in finding differences in the LEg corpus that can be mapped onto regional differences in later stages of Egyptian: Demotic and, of course, Coptic.
- According to the second option, regional differences found within the LEg corpus left no observable trace later on. Although this could *a priori* seem to weaken the analysis, this is actually not the case. Considering the important chronological gap between the last attestations of Late Egyptian and the first ones in Coptic, it would not be surprising that some dialectal features did not, for whatever reason,⁴¹ survive on the long run.

40 Modern and sophisticated databases are a welcome and significant step forward, but these will never be credible substitutes for a dictionary in the full meaning of the term.

41 For instance, there is no chance for possible variations in the LEg suffixal conjugation to have left many traces in Coptic since the predicative verbal system had by then systemically moved to other means of expression.

Different features illustrating various aspects of grammar (phonology, morphology and syntax), but also dealing with the lexicon show that there are indeed some correlations between Late Egyptian features that are restricted to specific areas of Egypt and corresponding Coptic dialects. As this first set of facts has been discussed elsewhere (Winand forthcoming c), I here limit myself to a simplified list with occasional comments.

In **phonology**, there is unsurprisingly (see above) not much data to deal with; a possible case – but with much hesitation – could be the old perfective of *ʒp*, written  in a few documents that are linked to the Memphite area. Such a spelling, which is unexpected for the 3ms, could note the metathesis found in Bohairic *ortt* (as opposed to Sahidic *wtṭ*).⁴²

For **non-verbal morphology**, the spelling  for *hrw* “day” in pl. seems typical of southern texts. With caution, it could be related to *ʔpɛɣ*, which is found only in A and A² in Coptic.

The case of the 3rd person plural suffix pronoun is also worth mentioning. The new form *ɜw* first appeared in texts that can be related to the Memphite area. In the Theban area, *ɜsn* has virtually disappeared by the end of the 20th dynasty (as everywhere else), but was still retained in some texts even as far as in the TIP.⁴³ This could probably suggest a dialectal split.

A last case that would deserve a specific study is the occasional use of the 3ms dep. pron. *sw* instead of the suf. pron. *ɜf* to express the direct object after an infinitive.⁴⁴ A very quick survey shows several occurrences, all coming from the South (with some hesitation for pBrooklyn 47.218.135), and with an increasing frequency at the end of the 20th dyn. and during the TIP:

špsɜ(j) nɜk pɜ dbn I (...) j.jr {jr} ɜj šsp sw nɜk <m> pɜ hrw

“I received for you the one deben (...); I received it for you, today!”



(pBM 10906, r° 7)

j.jrɜw dj.t sw hr tɜ bwɜ.t

“one puts him on the hill”

(pBrooklyn 47.218.135, 5,4)⁴⁵

In Coptic, there remains the possibility of using the pronoun *ce* instead of the suf. pron., except for Bohairic, which always uses *ɜoy*.

For **verbal morphology**, the infinitive of weak verbs, like 3^{ae} inf., regularly shows some variations between forms with (written  or ) and without *-t* in the pronominal state. A preliminary study of three widely attested verbs (*jnj*, *jrj* and *gmj*) suggests that the absence of ending is more frequent in the documents coming from the Memphis area, and that correlatively the presence of the ending *-t* is, as in the case of *jrj*, only seen in

42 The anonymous reviewer points out that the form *ortt* is only “attested in text editions of Amélineau and Budge, who are not the most trustworthy witnesses in such matters”.

43 See Giornale, pAbbott, pLéopold II-Amherst, oLouvre 698, pBoulaq 4, the oracular decree for Henuttaui, the oracular text of Sheshonq I, and somewhat later pTurin 248, a Theban contract from the time of Psammetichus I written in abnormal hieratic.

44 See Peust (2002), who discusses this issue for the verb *rdj*.

45 See also oDeM 1088, 7, oDeM 626, v° 3, pBoulaq 4, 16,16, pBM 10474, 21,2 *Wenamun* 2,6 (twice). In view of the evidence (note the presence of literary texts), Satzinger’s opinion (1997: 173) on Tjekker-Baal’s Egyptian should be reconsidered.

documents from the Theban area. This is of course reminiscent of the situation of Bohairic where the ending $-\tau$ is systematically absent. As noted by Ray (1994: 260), this is also consistent with the situation of Demotic.

In Winand (1992: § 179), I noted that some infinitives occasionally show an extension $-tj$ in late Ramesside or TIP texts. This, I ventured, could be linked to Akhmimic (see Osing 1976: 333–338), where an extra-ending $-\tau\epsilon$ is sometimes found. More recently, this observation received further support from similar spellings in the *Wisdom of Amenemope* (Laisney 2007: 18), a text that is linked to the region of Akhmim.⁴⁶

The subjunctive of jw “come” in the causative pattern rdj + subj. is regularly written ($\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$) except in two unrelated set of documents coming from Thebes (19th dyn. and late 20th dyn. resp.), where the spellings $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ and $\text{𓂏} \text{𓂏} \text{𓂏}$ are found. The stem jj - after rdj might thus represent a slight variant that was perhaps distinctive of the Theban dialect/idiom.

The regular split in the Future III according to the nature of the subject ($jw=f$ vs. jrj NP) is not uncommonly neutralized in southern texts, especially in the 20th dyn. and the TIP, by extending jw to the nominal subject. This nicely matches the situation of Akhmimic and related sub-dialects where the same phenomenon can be observed. As was pointed out elsewhere

“The case of the Future III is all the more interesting as it gives us the rare opportunity to make a distinction between the two meanings the word “dialect” can have in our studies. Since the pattern of the future is regular in Middle Egyptian, the split that occurred in Late Egyptian between jw + pron. subj. and jrj + nominal subj. can be explained as an influence of the regional dialect where Late Egyptian had its nest before becoming the new national standard. As was pointed out, it was probably somewhere around the area of Memphis. The permanence of jw in some texts from Upper Egypt must thus be analysed as a regional variant in the synchrony of Late Egyptian, probably as some substrate left by the Middle Egyptian standard.” (Winand forthcoming c)

Finally, as extensively studied by Peust (2007), the verb “go” in LEg uses in complementary distribution two different lexemes ($\text{𓂏}m$ and $\text{𓂏}n$, plus $n\text{𓂏}$ marginally) according to the grammatical tenses. In imperative, however, both verbs can be found but with a striking geographical distribution: while $\text{𓂏}m$ is attested all across Egypt, $\text{𓂏}n$ seems to be limited to texts coming from the South.

Some interesting observations can also be made in **syntax**. For instance, while the canonical order verb + $n\text{𓂏}f$ + sw of Classical Egyptian was superseded in LEg by the sequence verb + sw + $n\text{𓂏}f$, the older scheme remained sporadically in use, but only in texts coming from the Theban area as late as the 21st dyn.

Another case is the expression of the new causative. The pattern rdj + $\text{𓂏}m.tw(\text{𓂏}f)$, which is overwhelmingly attested across the Nile Valley, is sometimes challenged by a new pattern rdj + infinitive, which would always remain marginal. When looking at statistics, the infinitive is widely represented in the Theban area, but is exceedingly rare in the Memphite area.

46 See above, à propos the Future III.

As regards the **lexicon**, only occasional observations can be made given the lack of detailed inquiries into the vocabulary. For instance, the substitution of the old compound *r-rwtj* “outside” with *r-bnr(w)* could suggest that the latter was a regional variant, outside the written tradition as hinted by the fact that it was very quickly spelled in syllabic writing, which is a strong indication that a word was felt by the scribes as new or foreign.⁴⁷

In conclusion, while some of the cases that have been discussed contribute only marginally to the issue addressed here (or can even be disputed), the evidence seems strong enough to support the claim that dialectal variations quite unequivocally show up in the Late Egyptian texts.

5.3 Other strategies

After squeezing out as much as possible from the data according to the first strategy, one has no other choice but to be imaginative to find innovative approaches in order to build a better case. All these new strategies have something in common. The idea is no more to show dialectal variations within Late Egyptian, but rather to test the hypothesis of Late Egyptian having itself a dialectal origin. If one prefers, one moves from a synchronic to a diachronic perspective. I shall thus here be more interested in phenomena of various kinds that could suggest possible breaks or unexpected shifts in the evolution of Egyptian. Strategies like these of course require extreme caution.

5.3.1 The By-Pass Hypothesis

What is here called the By-Pass Hypothesis is already well-known in Egyptology. It was first observed by Edgerton (1951) that some linguistic features could disappear from the screen only to reappear later, skipping the intermediary stage. He noted that there were isoglosses common to OEg and LEg, but conspicuously absent in MEg. He mainly pointed facts belonging to morphology (presence of a *yod prostheticum* in OEg and LEg, but absent in MEg),⁴⁸ and syntax (agreement of the demonstrative in the nominal predication in OEg [*pw*, *tw*, *nw*] and LEg [*p3y*, *t3y*, *n3y*] vs. invariable *pw* in MEg; position of the adjective in the nominal predication [*t3 nfr pw/p3y* in OEg and LEg vs. *t3 pw nfr* in MEg]).⁴⁹ To this one can add lexical features, like the revival of some words in LEg (including grammatical ones, like personal pronouns *hwt* and *swt*) after an eclipse during the MK (Winand forthcoming a). These words, which were written traditionally in OEg, were frequently transcribed in syllabic writing when they were, so to say, rediscovered by the scribes in the NK. As already pointed out, this is a clear indication of a break in the written tradition. The following table gives some examples of words already used in OEg, absent

47 See Winand (forthcoming a) for some cases in Late Egyptian.

48 Except in some passages of the CT, where it obviously continued an older tradition (on this phenomenon in general, see Vernus 1996).

49 To this one can add interesting observations recently made by Kupreyev during the last ICE in Florence (August 2015) on the distribution of the demonstratives from a regional perspective.

in MEg texts, except for occasional appearances in religious texts (for this, see above), and used again in LEg with a modern (syllabic) writing.⁵⁰
















	Old Kingdom	Middle Kingdom	New Kingdom
<i>trp</i> “goose”		[religious texts]	
<i>b3k.t</i> “mother cow”		[Coffin texts]	
<i>sk3</i> “ass’s foal”			
<i>wsi</i> “to saw”			
<i>twt</i> “you”		[Coffin texts + rel. texts]	
<i>swt</i> “he”			
<i>in</i> “focalising partic.” ⁵¹			

Table 1. Breaks in the lexicon: from OEg to LEg

At the other end of the history of Egyptian, special bonds between LEg and Bohairic have been observed. Without attempting to reach any conclusion as regards the history of the language, Shisha-Halevy (1981) noted some typological similarities (essentially in morphology and syntax, and occasionally in lexicon) shared by LEg and Bohairic, with their (near) total exclusion from Sahidic, which here serves as the *comparandum* within Coptic. This study opens indeed interesting perspectives, but it does not come without problems of its own.

- To start with, the bonds between LEg and Bohairic are quite different in nature as the ones noted above between OEg and LEg since the evidence of Demotic has not been taken into account.
- Second, and this is of course consistent with the claim that is made here, although Coptic is considered in its dialectal diversity, Late Egyptian is taken as a single, homogeneous unity.
- For instance, the conjunctive in Sahidic is by default $\overline{\text{nt}}\epsilon\text{-}$ (before noun phrases), but $\text{nt}\epsilon\text{-}$ in Bohairic, which is of course the copy of LEg *mtw-*. But this does not tell much about the relation between LEg and Bohairic as *mtw-* is still the form normally found in Demotic. To this, one must add that the base nt- is also found in

50 The preposition *jrm*, which will gradually supersede *hn* in LEg (cf. Coptic mn), is regularly written in syllabic writing; although it cannot yet be linked to any form in OEg, one cannot exclude the possibility that it represented a regional variety that did not have access to the written culture. As a preposition, a foreign origin, although not completely excluded, is less likely (on the scales of borrowability, in respect with the grammatical vs. lexical items distinction, see Haspelmath 2010).

51 The etymology of *hwn3* remains a topic of discussion. The putative relation between *jn* and *jwn3* admittedly needs some further research. See Winand (1997: 234).

Sahidic (1sg, 1pl, and 2pl), and that Bohairic occasionally shows $\text{nc}\epsilon\text{-}$ instead of ntoy .⁵²

- The post-negation marker ΔH as used in Bohairic seems to Shisha-Halevy (1981: 324) closer to LEg usage, because it is more freely used as compared to Sahidic. Actually, the situation in LEg is quite different from what is presented by Shisha-Halevy. The particle $jwn3$ is indeed a pragmatic reinforcer, which means that its presence was never felt obligatory. But it became increasingly so in pragmatically heavy loaded patterns, like the nominal predication of the A-Ø type and the emphatic formations (Winand 1997). The last case is thus at odds with the situation in Bohairic, where according to Shisha-Halevy the absence of ΔH is striking in negated second tenses constructions.⁵³
- The case of the Future III as presented by Shisha-Halevy (1981: 323–324) is also problematic, because the southern Coptic dialects have been left out of the picture. As it turns out, the complementary pattern of the Future III (jw + suff. pron. vs. jrj + NP) is probably the result of some still unclear dialectal incorporation (see below). But at one point in time, the old MEg pattern jw + NP, which had probably survived as a dialectal substratum in the South, resurfaced in LEg in the Theban (and more broadly southern) area, to eventually become the norm in Akhmimic (see above).⁵⁴ Although impossible to reject from a purely theoretical viewpoint, the possibility that LEg experienced a dialectal split of its own, with the Theban area adopting by

52 I here thank the anonymous reviewer for this precision.

53 While in most cases, $jwn3$ is indeed in trailing position in LEg, as noted by Shisha-Halevy, there are exceptions: *bn jw:j gr n.k jwn3 hr t3 md.t n njw* “I will not remain silent at all with you about the matter of the spears” (pTurin 1971, 14). This most often occurs when a nominal phrase expands cataphorically a personal pronoun: e.g. *bn sw m šsr iwn3 p3 j.jr:t* “it is not good at all what you have done” (pBerlin 10497, v° 7; see also pBN 237, fgt 5, r° 2, for a slightly different situation). As for the first case (# negation + predication + $jwn3$ + adverbial phrase #), which is admittedly rare, it is interesting to note that it seems to be avoided in documents coming from Lower Egypt, which could suggest an areal distribution. One can here contrast *bn mntk sr jw jnzk m k.t s.t r dj.tzk r mjn3 jwn3* “you are definitely not an officer that has been brought from another place to be put here” (pAn. V, 26,6), from Lower Egypt, with *jw bn sw šrj jwn3 m p3 hpr p3 nty-jwzf nfr nzs p3y* “and this will not be small at all provided that this is what will be good for her” (pCGC 58032, 110–111), from Upper Egypt. As noted by Grossman (p.c.) “Actually the whole thing is considerably more complex. I understand the work by Shisha-Halevy and Funk as being really coherent with yours. In Bohairic, ΔH is compatible with constructions with which it never occurred in LEg, as far as I know. On the other hand, there are conservative uses without ΔH . Funk showed that there are different kinds of ‘lack of H- ’ in the different dialects, in some cases really absent and in others zeroed.” As a last point, the anonymous reviewer observed, contra Shisha-Halevy’s statement, that ΔH does appear in negated second tense patterns in Bohairic (e.g. Lk 4:4). He also notes that “intrusive jn -negations common in Bohairic are attested in Demotic already, mostly with imperatives”, which once more highlights the risks of not taking into account the intermediary stage between Late Egyptian and Coptic.

54 The distribution of future constructions in the Coptic Theban dialect is more complex than what is usually presented in textbooks: see Müller (2007), esp. p. 82–89.

analogy the same pattern for the nominal and the pronominal subject (*jw* + NP/suff. pron.), appears less likely.

- The case of the extension of the second tenses to adverbial predicates is also worth considering. According to Shisha-Halevy (1981: 321–322), the “orthodox” position of Bohairic, which does not accept such extensions, as opposed to Sahidic where they are common, can be compared to the situation of LEg. Actually, in later LEg, the emphatic pattern opened to new predicates: the adverbial phrase and the old perfective. Without too much surprise, the first occurrences appear in the colloquial language of the thieves as reported by the scribes in the Great Tomb Robberies papyri (Winand forthcoming b).⁵⁵ They seem to be restricted to the South, which might be accidental, for the number of examples is quite limited. Such extensions of the emphatic construction to stative, non-dynamic predicates can also be observed in Demotic, which once more calls for caution about the consequences one could be tempted to draw from some typological similarities between LEg and Bohairic.

5.3.2 The Sudden Death Paradox

I now come to what I call the Sudden Death Paradox. I have in mind some patterns that are distinct features of Late Egyptian, being overwhelmingly present to such an extent that they became emblematic of this stage of Egyptian, but for some reasons rather quickly disappeared in Demotic. The best example of this category is undoubtedly the so-called sequential *jwzfh sdm*, which passes for diagnostic of LEg, and whose absence in later texts is consequently interpreted as a proof of their being written in Demotic rather than in LEg.⁵⁶

The sequential *jwzfh sdm* is ubiquitous in LEg. It is the construction *par excellence* for expressing chains of events in narrative.⁵⁷ In *Wenamun*, whose composition can be approximately dated to the mid-21st dyn. (Winand 2011), it is still the by-default pattern (the *wn.jn* and *h^c.n* constructions are no more in use). Unfortunately, the number of LEg texts with extended narrative sections is considerably reduced in the TIP, but traces of it can be spotted here and there in the 22nd and 23rd dyn.,⁵⁸ down to the reign of Darius I.⁵⁹ It is striking that all the texts where the sequential is still in use have a southern origin. Of course, this can simply be a consequence of the geographical distribution of the data in the TIP. With due caution, I would nevertheless suggest that the absence of such a living

55 For instance, *j.jrzj m-dj jmn-h^c pzy hrd n mwt-m-hb t3y.i hnwt* “I was with A., this child of M, my mistress” (pBM 10052, r^o 7,8).

56 See Shisha-Halevy (1989) and Quack (1995), *à-propos* pVandier. In Demotic, a narrative chain is normally expressed by a sequence of perfects *sdmzf*. It should be noted that chains of perfective are not unheard of in LEg; actually, it is not exceptional at all in reports, in what I called elsewhere “discours narratif”. I leave this for another paper, as it deserves a full study of its own.

57 A quick search in Ramses returned 3467 results (last access: 18/2/2016).

58 The sequential is still present in the “el-Hibeh” corpus, in the Dakhleh stela (JEA 19, 1933, l. 5–7), and in the oracular papyrus Brooklyn 16.205 (y. 49 of Sheshonq III). See already Vernus’ commentary (1990a: 182sq).

59 Contrary to what is generally assumed, the sequential seems to be still in use in pRylands IX (see Lescuyer & Winand, forthcoming).

construction in Demotic is much in favor of the hypothesis that Demotic is the written realization of a (Northern?) dialect that had developed other means for expressing chains of narrative. The fact that pRylands IX, where the sequential can still sporadically be found, was discovered in el-Hibeh, the very place of provenience of *Wenamun*, is perhaps not accidental in this respect.

One can also consider constructions that were on the verge of grammaticalising, but faced a sudden, unexpected halt, and never survived the transition from Late Egyptian to Demotic. The best example in this category is probably the pattern *jwzj ḥḥ.kwj ḥr sdm* (and variants) that is attested everywhere in Egypt, and must be viewed as a suppletive mean of expressing progressive in a language where the semantic opposition between progressive and non-progressive was preserved, as a grammatical opposition, only in negative.⁶⁰

Another case, but more limited as regards the number of occurrences, is offered by the so-called analogical constructions of the Future III (Winand 1996). While the first attestations of the Future III with an adverbial predicate go back to the end of the 18th dyn., the old perfective became frequent only much later. One should also note that the full set of the syntactic conversions (circumstantial *jw*, and relative *ntj*), and the possibility of using the negation *bn* was still uncommon in the 19th dyn.

jwzn dj.t nzs ḥs.t m-b3ḥ jmn ḥnsw jwzs rwd.<tj>, jw bn jwzs šḥd.<tj>

“And we shall give her blessings before Amun, Khonsu, and she will be made strong and she will not be cut off” (pTurin 1984, 92 – 22nd dyn.)

smn st jw jwzw smn n s3 n s3zf

“Confirm it so that they will be confirmed for the son of his son”

(stela Dakhleh, 14–15 – 22nd dyn.)

One has thus the feeling that the extension of the Future III to adverbial predicates and old perfectives, undoubtedly by analogy with the Present I, was not completely integrated before the beginning of the TIP. Thus, the fact that a construction that was on the rise in the last phase of LEg failed to pass on to Demotic invites us to draw the same conclusion as in the previous cases.

To stay a little while with the Future III, the fact that *jw*, which was used in MEg with any kind of subject (Vernus 1990b), was partly replaced by *jrrj* when the subject was nominal also calls for attention. As already noted (see above), *jw* + NP sporadically resurfaced in the South during the Ramesside period, but more vigorously in the TPI. Thus, it is perhaps not a coincidence that the first occurrence of *jrrj* is found on a text from Saqqarah (pCGC 58054, from the reign of Amenhotep III).

t3 štj.t (?) ntj jr nbj r dj.tzs nzk

“The leather-cushion (?) that Nebi will bring you”

(pCGC 58054, v^o2–3)

This could be interpreted as another manifestation of the Sudden Death Paradox: the *jw* paradigm that has been overwhelmingly generalized in MEg was suddenly split when

60 See Winand (2006: 311). On some side-effects of the progressive, see recently Winand (2015).

LEg became the new standard. The older formation survived as a substratum in the South before resurfacing again in later LEg and in some Coptic dialects.

I here leave aside some innovative, but isolated, constructions found in MEg that never really crystallized in the grammatical system. I have more particularly in mind two future-oriented constructions that were obviously formed by analogy, namely the negative pattern *nn sw r sdm* and *twj r sdm*.

The first one is attested only once in the tomb of Anktjff (FIP):

nn sw r hpr

“he shall not come into existence”

(Mo’alla, II, α, 2)⁶¹

The construction *twj r sdm* is present on the Kamose stela:

twj r thn hnʕf sdm htʕf

“I am going to engage in battle with him and I will break his body”

(tCarnarvon 4)⁶²

This ‘exploratory Future III’ (Stauder 2013: 45) clusters in this text with other innovative features. It appears at the very moment the new paradigm of the pronominal subject of the Present I (*twj*, *twk*, etc.) becomes more widespread. But contrary to the latter paradigm, the tentative “present-future” never made it in the LEg tense system.⁶³

The two constructions that have been very briefly discussed here should probably be accounted for as isolated innovations made by individuals (idiolect) who felt free enough to explore new paths for expressing their ideas. If considered from a purely statistical perspective, they do not seem to be the tiny visible part of a larger community of speakers that would have used these constructions in some (largely) unwritten dialect.

At the juncture of MEg and LEg, the disappearance of *jw* with a nominal subject in the Future III in favor of *jrj* is totally unexpected and unpredictable. From the internal viewpoint of MEg, there is nothing to suggest that replacing a uniform paradigm by a split construction was a natural development in the history of the language. The possible explanation would be to consider that the new construction *jrj* + NP has its origin in the area that nurtured what had to become LEg.⁶⁴ This place of origin could be somewhere

61 See Vernus (1990: 130–131), Stauder (2013: 371, n. 140). In my opinion, there is no need to discard this example as a negative construction with a future meaning. But there is no need to place it forcefully within the diachronic evolution of Egyptian either, nor to view it as a dialectal feature, which of course always remains possible at a pure theoretical level. I would rather suggest that the scribe tested/played here (with) a new construction, as he obviously did in other parts of the text.

62 Transl. Stauder (2013: 45).

63 The construction is called *Frühneuägyptisches Futur* by Kroeber (1970: 93–97), and exploratory Future III by Stauder (2013: 45). This implies that *twj r sdm* diachronically and functionally was replaced by *jwʕf r sdm*, which remains debatable, as this very short-lived construction seems to convey a mellic meaning, “be about to do something” (in the sense of Winand 2006: 175). Note that the construction *twj m nʕj r sdm*, which is first attested in late 20th and 21st dyn., is built on the pattern of the Present I.

64 In his paper on the origins of the Future III, Kruchten (2010) envisages the diachronic evolution of Egyptian in a straightforward vertical way, without any sensibility for possible dialectal

around Memphis (see below). The double fact that 1/ there is one instance of *jw* + NP in an oath given by a peasant figured on a scene in the Theban tomb of Nebamon (TT 90, mid-18th dyn.), and 2/ all the examples of *jw* + NP that are registered much later (end 20th dyn. and TIP) also come from the Theban area (or more broadly from Upper Egypt) points to the same conclusion, namely the southern origin of MEg.

5.3.3 The Unexpected Resurrection Paradox

I am now considering the last strategy that could be indicative of a dialectal shift. I here have in mind some features that were gradually and inexorably disappearing in LEg, becoming nearly extinct by the 21st dyn., but surprisingly experienced a second youth in Demotic. This constitutes the mirror-case of the Sudden Death Paradox, and can lead, in my opinion, to the same kind of conclusions. The diachronic evolution of *hn^c* (in relation with *jrm*) might offer an illustration of this. In a previous paper (Winand 2014a), I tried to find some clues for distinguishing between the COORDINATIVE function properly speaking and the COMITATIVE function of these two prepositions. When considering the broad picture, the uses of *hn^c* and *jrm* seem to be exactly mirroring one another: the former one represents roughly 95% of the tokens against the latter one at the turn of the 18-19th dyn., and gradually declines during the Ramesside times to drop to 5% by the end of the 20th dyn. From the internal point of view of LEg, it would have been a safe prognostic to claim that *hn^c* would have completely disappeared in Demotic. This is not what can actually be observed, but quite the contrary, for *hn^c* seems to be rejuvenated and still used productively in different configurations.

This admittedly reinforces the impression that some words shared the vicissitudes of the regional varieties of Egyptian as they moved to and receded from the national stage. Obviously one is still in need of further case studies before making generalizations.

6 Dialects and the evolution of ancient Egyptian

The existence of dialects in ancient Egypt as multiple realisations of one single language among communities of speakers scattered over 1000 km along the Nile Valley has never been really challenged in the scholarly literature (see the Common Sense Principle in the introductory section). As it seems, the issue of dialects as regards the written production of the scribes over more than 3000 years is twofold:

- to which extant dialectal differences can show up in synchrony?
- to which extant a dialect can influence the evolution of a *national* language?

interferences. The apparition of *jrj* with a NP is given a name (“assimilation homonymique”), but it is never actually really explained. Important for Kruchten’s demonstration is the claim that *jw* would not accept an adverbial predicate before the 17th dyn., once having loaded with the seme “future” (2010: 143). Such an assertion is problematic in regard to earlier examples like: *jn jwz k r z n nhj* “shall you be a man for eternity?” (Peasant, B1 126).

Despite its long history and the really rich amount of written material, ancient Egyptian has not proved to be very cooperative with scholars in this respect. Tradition casts a permanent veil between the modern observer and the so much desired raw linguistic material: tradition in writing, tradition in the scribal schools. Tradition is here taken as a cover-term for a more complex reality that can be mapped onto a field divided along two axes: standardization vs. variation and vernacularity vs. formality (Polis forthcoming, fig. 4.2). There is nothing like recorded speech or immediate (without any intermediate party) life captions in ancient Egypt; the “as if spoken” Egyptian is, for the best of my knowledge, an illusion that is for mysterious reasons still kept alive in some circles.⁶⁵ The vivid and so full-of-life exchanges between working class people in the tomb decorative programmes (the so-called *Reden und Rufe*) or the testimonies given by the defendants and witnesses as recorded in the Great Tomb Robberies papyri – two cases where one has the feeling of a direct communication with ancient Egyptians – did not escape formatting (for both) and transmission processes (for the first case).⁶⁶ This of course does not mean that what was recorded has nothing to do with some spoken reality (as exemplified by occasional uses of slang), but the levelling, standardizing process more or less consciously imposed by the scribes is never to be underestimated.

It should not thus come as a surprise that manifestations of dialectal variety, if any, can only be occasional and limited in number. Due to the very nature of the hieroglyphic script, variations affecting the phonological system or (in some way) morphology are the most difficult to spot.

In this paper, I mainly focussed on Late Egyptian. Of course, when looking very generally at LEg, a picture of uniformity almost imposes itself. But I hope that the evidence brought so far is sufficient enough to build a solid case in favour of some dialectal diversification. While the facts might still seem quite limited in number, they cover the main domains that matter in any linguistic description: phonology, non-verbal and verbal morphology, syntax, lexicon. In our present state of knowledge, it seems too adventurous to go beyond a basic distinction between a northern and a southern dialect (see below).

My general assumption is that a sensible approach of dialects can shed an interesting light on the general history of Egyptian. The available evidence seems already sufficient enough to suggest different paths of evolution. I shall now envisage three main cases: internal dialectal differentiation limited to LEg (§6.1), internal LEg dialectal differentiation with correspondences in later stages of Egyptian (§6.2), the Dialectal Hypothesis as an explanation of historical change in Egyptian (§6.3).

65 See, for instance, Kruchten (2010: 133) à propos Akhenaton's Boundaries stelae: “le moyen égyptien (...) y côtoie le néo-égyptien, tel qu'il était effectivement parlé à l'époque (...). Les serments d'Akhénaton (...) doivent reproduire les paroles mêmes du souverain, telles qu'il les a prononcées et telles qu'elles ont immédiatement été notées sous la dictée par ses scribes.”

66 For a linguistic assessment of the LEg used in the Great Tomb Robberies papyri, see Winand (forthcoming a and c). As regards the *Arbeiterreden*, see the upcoming PhD Aurore Motte is writing under my supervision.

6.1 Internal dialectal differentiation limited to LEg

According to the Common Sense Principle, there is every possibility for some dialectal variations to appear in LEg without leaving any trace in subsequent stages of Egyptian. This first case is not well illustrated, except for the marginal case of the regional distribution of *hn* and *sm* in the imperative of the verb “go” (see above). One other case might be considered here for its methodological relevance: the alternation in the causative pattern between *dj.t* + passive subjunctive and *dj.t* + infinitive, the latter one being characteristic of the South. Put in such terms, the issue cannot have any sense in Coptic since the suffix conjugation had by then been lost. In Demotic, the normal equivalent of *dj.t sdm.tw* + subject (passive) is *dj.t sdmzw* + object,

jwzj (r) dj.t jnzw nzt sʳrt wjnn

“I shall let some Greek wool be brought to you”

(pBerlin P 23495,9)

but the pattern *dj.t* + infinitive, albeit rare, was not completely unknown:

bnpʳf djs nʳf dd w3hʳj dj.t jn wʳ sʳf n X

“He did not pay it to him saying ‘I had let a knife be brought to X’”

(oIfAO dém. Edfou 1001, 7–8 = Devauchelle, *BIFAO* 89, 1989, p. 81–88)

This would of course require a detailed inquiry, understandably outside the limits and the scope of this paper, to come to a proper assessment of Demotic data and evaluate if the southern provenience of Ex. 11 is a sheer coincidence, or must be linked to the LEg data.

Put on a map, this first class can be represented like this:⁶⁷

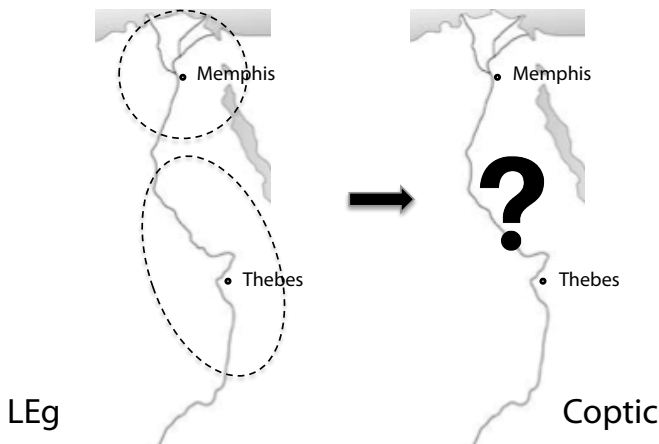


Fig. 2. Internal dialectal split in LEg with no successor in later stages

⁶⁷ The geographical limits of the two dialectal areas do not obviously pretend to any kind of accuracy.

6.2 Internal LEg dialectal differentiation with correspondences in later stages of Egyptian

In some admittedly rare cases, dialectal distribution in LEg seems to match what can be observed in later stages, in Demotic and Coptic. The most interesting case is that of the pronominal state of the weak verbs in the infinitive: the ending $-t$ is regularly attested in the South, and normally missing in the North; this can be related to the situation of Demotic and Coptic where a split can be observed between Bohairic (no ending) and the other dialects (ending normally present, but with occasional misses).

Such phenomena suggest that some dialectal splits occurred in the synchrony of LEg. In contrast to the previous case (6.1), these differentiated treatments were more firmly anchored, and they survived in subsequent stages.⁶⁸

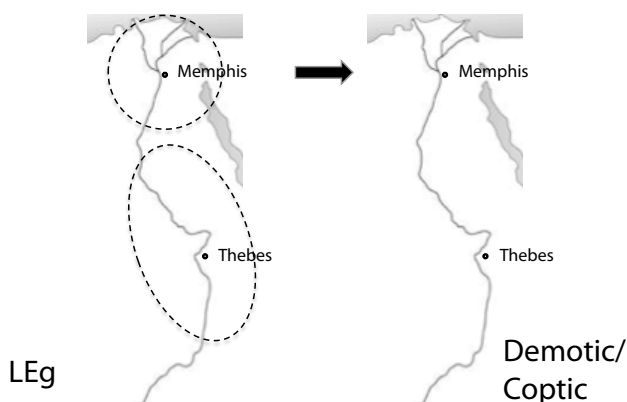


Fig. 3. Internal LEg dialectal differentiation with correspondences in later stages of Egyptian

6.3 The Dialectal Hypothesis as an explanation of historical change in Egyptian

Under this heading, I envisage different cases that show how problematic can be a straightforward vertical succession of the five major phases of Egyptian, from OEg down to Coptic. To illustrate this, I pick up five emblematic case studies

6.3.1 Case 1: OEg *hm.t tw* vs. MEg *hm.t pw* vs. LEg *hm.t t3y*

According to the By-Pass Hypothesis (§ 7.1), some distinctive features of OEg that had disappeared in MEg were brought back to live in LEg (fig. 4). This can be observed in morphology, syntax and lexicon.

⁶⁸ One has every reason to think that the Demotic data should support this distribution, but this would require an investigation of a magnitude totally outside the scope of this paper. But see already Ray (1994: 260).

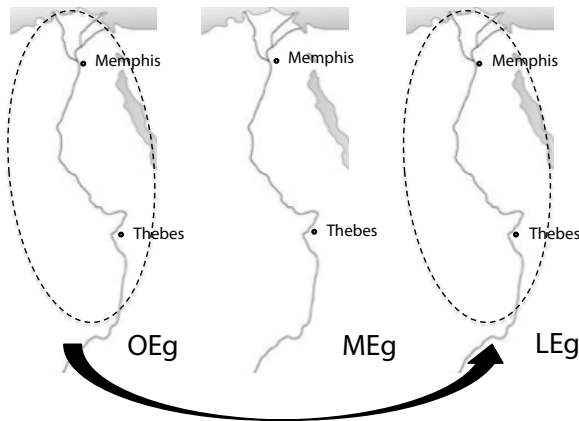


Fig. 4. The By-Pass Hypothesis: from OEg to LEg

For the history of Egyptian, this can be accounted for if one accepts a) that what once became a national language was previously a regional variant that had no access to the written culture, b) that OEg and Late Egyptian probably originated from the same area, while MEg had its nest elsewhere, c) that the elements that were replaced by the intervening party, in this case MEg, can c') either disappear altogether or c'') go underground, i.e. disappear from the written culture, before coming back again in light. The following figure captures this process.

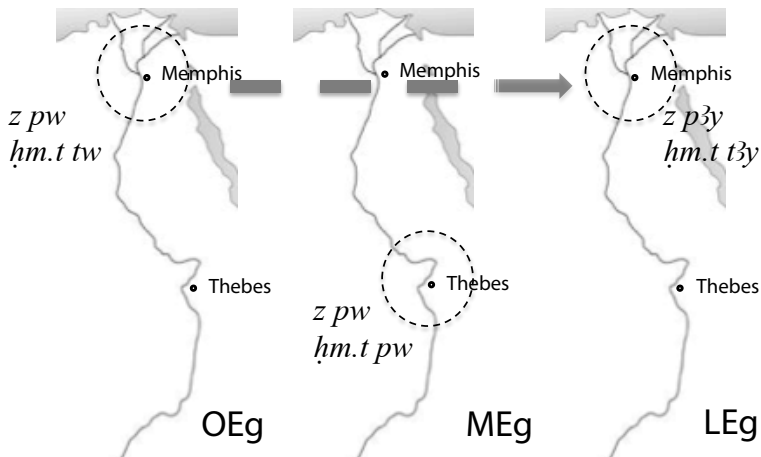


Fig. 5. The By-Pass Hypothesis: the case of the nominal predication

6.3.2 Case 2: the replacement of εsn by εw

The change of 3rd pl. suf. pron. is a distinctive mark of LEg. As quickly reminded above (§ 6), the old EEg pronoun, εsn , is still found in texts whose southern origin can be

ascertained. This seems to be more frequent at the end of the 20th dyn. and during the TIP. This once more could suggest that *sw* developed in the area where LEg had its origin, and correlatively that *sn* was longer preserved in the area that nurtured MEg (fig. 6).

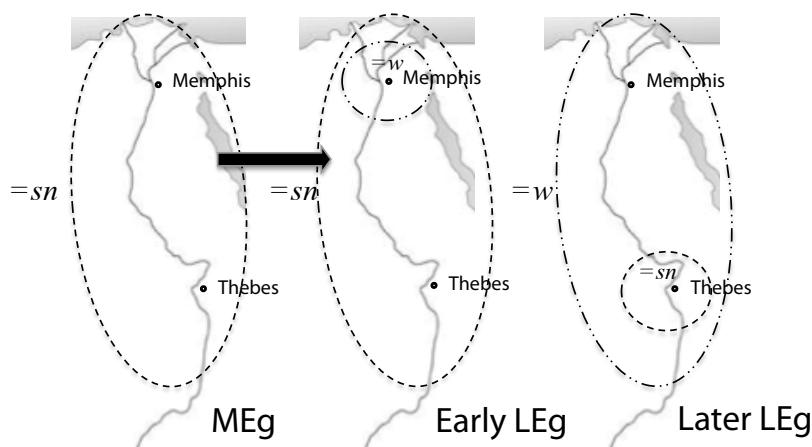


Fig. 6. The replacement of *sn* by *sw*

6.3.3 Case 3: the Future III with a nominal subject

The substitution of *jw NP r sdm* with *jrj NP (r) sdm* remains puzzling, as a kind of unnecessary extravaganza of LEg. The former pattern was nevertheless preserved in some texts coming from Upper Egypt (in parallel with the new one), and finally managed to survive as the sole pattern in some Upper Egyptian Coptic dialects.

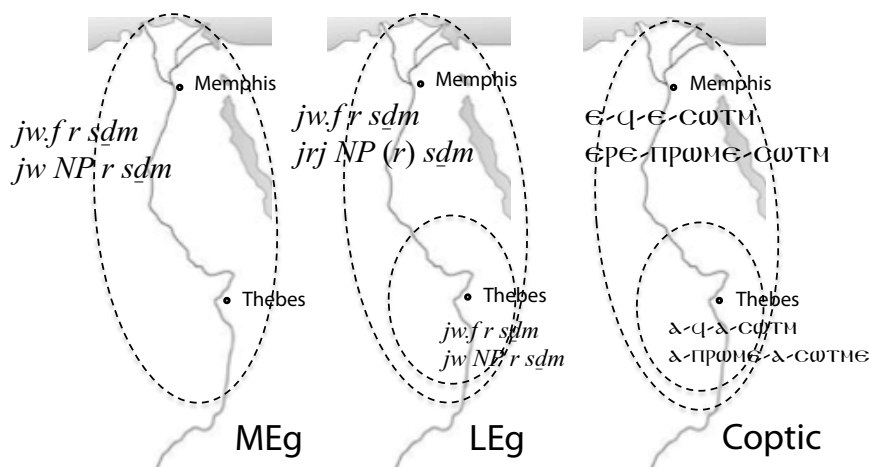


Fig. 7. The case of the Future III (general view)

Of course, one could consider that there was a genuine dialectal split in the South where the old pattern would have been by chance rediscovered, but this does not seem very likely. I prefer to interpret the data as a double proof of the regional provenience of both MEG and LEG, with the new pattern having its origin in Lower Egypt, while the old one survived where MEG came from.

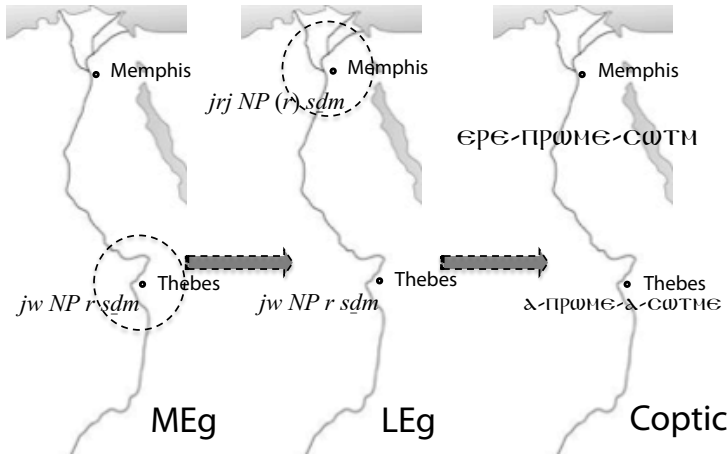


Fig. 8. The case of the Future III (the case of the nominal subject)

6.3.4 Case 4: the Sudden Death and the Unexpected Resurrection Paradox

In this study, I was also interested in what seemed to me abrupt and unexpected turns in the evolution of Egyptian if one wanted to stick to the linear theory of evolution. I thus had a closer look at a) widely used patterns that completely disappeared in Demotic (Sudden Death Paradox) and b) patterns whose disappearance seemed a fair prognosis from a LEg perspective, but quite surprisingly experienced a second life in Demotic (Unexpected Resurrection Paradox). The case of the sequential *jwzfh sdm* is emblematic in this respect. The fact that this pattern seems to have been in use for some time in Upper Egypt in early Demotic also calls for attention.

There is general agreement that Demotic developed out of a Lower Egypt regional variety. The case of the sequential could a priori be taken as a counter-argument. In the previous sections, I suggested that LEg also had its origin in Lower Egypt. Actually, there is no objection for both LEg and Demotic to have their origin in Lower Egypt. To start with, Lower Egypt is here used as a cover term. One can for instance speculate that LEg originally grew up around Memphis, while the birth-place of Demotic should rather be located somewhere else in the Delta (Sais?). But, more to the point, remains the possibility that Demotic actually took over a new way of expressing chains of narrative events that had already developed in a northern variety of LEg,⁶⁹ which remains for the time being

⁶⁹ As already pointed out, the new pattern (chain of *sdmzf*s) is already attested in LEg.

unobservable because of the gap in our documentation for LEg texts dated from the TIP to the beginning of the Saite period coming from Lower Egypt.

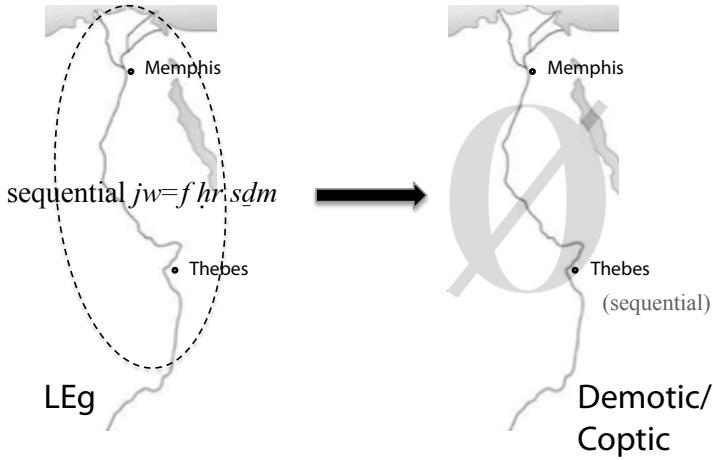


Fig. 9. The case of the sequential *jw=f hr sdm*

6.3.5 Case 5: a variant attested in LEg is retained as a variant in some Coptic dialects:
the alternance of *_w* vs. *st* for expressing the dir. obj. of the infinitive

I quickly reviewed some (to be enlarged) evidence showing that alongside the 3rd pl. suf. pron. *sw*, which always remained the rule for expressing the direct object of the infinitive, the dependent pronoun *st* is sporadically attested as a variant in texts from Upper Egypt. This situation is more or less mirrored in Coptic, where *sw* is of course the rule, but an allomorph *ce* is sometimes attested in all dialects, with the notable exception of Bohairic.

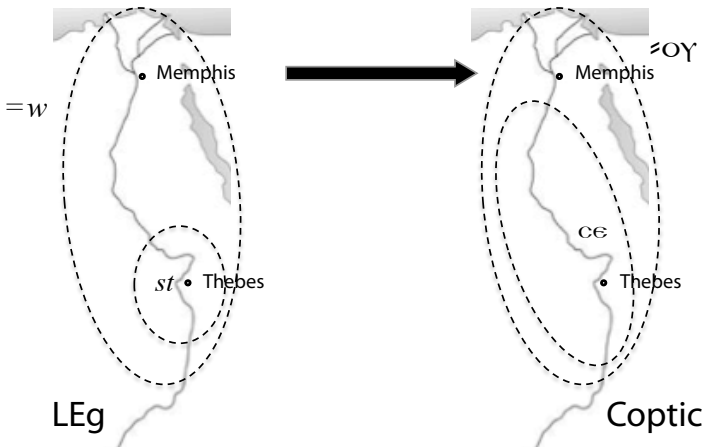


Fig. 10. The alternance of *sw* vs. *st* for expressing the dir. obj. of the infinitive

7 Concluding remarks

Other cases should deserve a closer look, like the evolution of the pattern of the conjunctive, very briefly alluded to (§5.2). Some constructions raise a lot of questions that still await a proper explanation. This is for example the case of the emergence and diffusion of the Future I.⁷⁰ This construction is first attested at the very end of the 20th dyn. (a letter from the West Bank) and in the 21st dyn. (a letter from ‘el-Hibeh’), then went unnoticed for almost seven centuries before coming back in use in Demotic, and later in Coptic (ⲧⲏⲁϥⲱⲧⲏ). In Demotic, examples of the Future I are almost exclusively found in the South except for two cases in the Fayum. Chronologically, the occurrences from Upper Egypt largely predate those of the Fayum. No example further north of the Fayum has been discovered so far. It is thus tempting, taking the data at their face value, to assign a southern, maybe more precisely a Theban, origin to this construction, which, for some reasons impossible to precise, disappear from our written documentation for many centuries before reappearing in the same area, whence it then spread all over Upper and Middle Egypt. In Coptic the Future I is common to all dialects. If correct, our reconstruction could be illustrated as shown in Fig. 11:

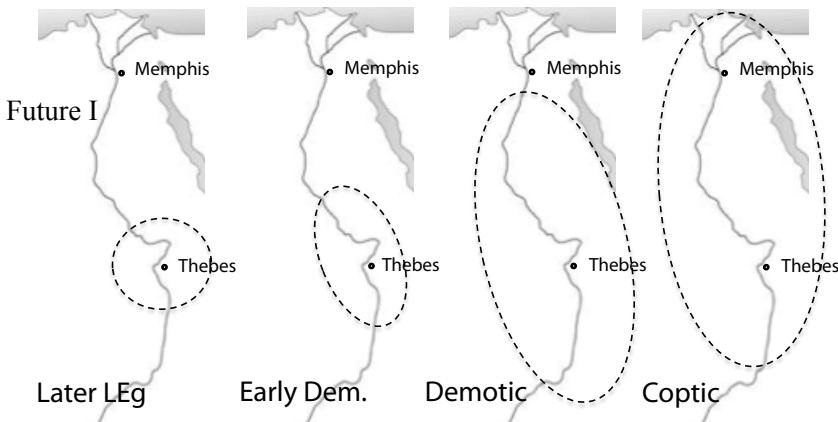


Fig. 11. The chronological dispersion of the Future I, from LEg to Coptic

The aim of this paper was not to give (nor to analyze) all the evidence for all stages of Egyptian. This would require a lot of preliminary studies that far exceed the scope of this paper, and the limited competence of the present writer. I hope I have given enough evidence to support the double claim a) that dialects in pre-Coptic Egyptian are a reality in the written documentation, and b) that dialects could play a significant role in the evolution of Egyptian.⁷¹

⁷⁰ See Grossman, Lescuyer & Polis (2014).

⁷¹ As already mentioned above (see Grossman's remark given in fn. 9), the diachronic processes are probably much more complex and richer than what is presented here.

The motives for linguistic change will probably continue to elude us. One is very often tempted to correlate the successive stages in the evolution of Egyptian with the major political changes that affected Egyptian history. This was already how Kurt Sethe reconstructed the history of Egyptian that was made, according to him, of abrupt and rapid changes corresponding to the coming of a new ruling dynasty (“Kataklysmen-Theorie”):

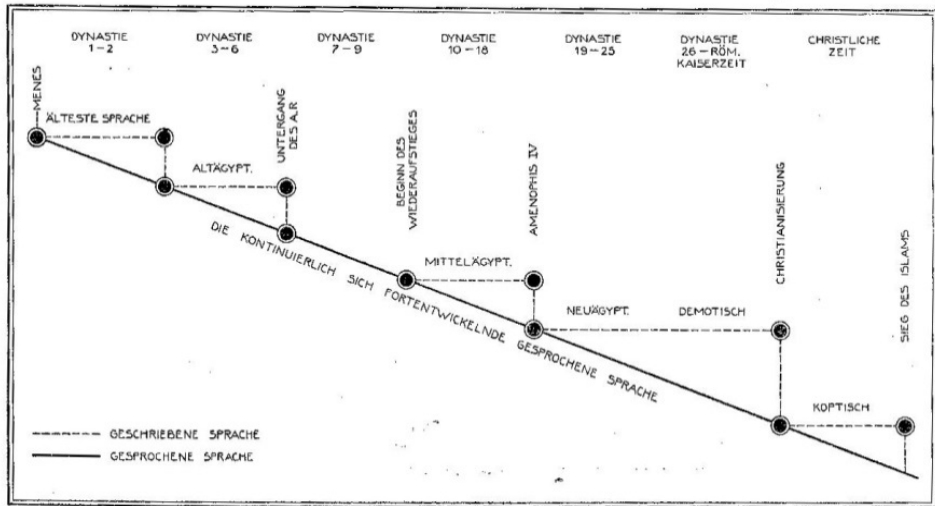


Fig. 12. The evolution of Egyptian according to Sethe (1924)

While the political agenda undoubtedly affected the language policy (and the use of writing⁷²), as anywhere where there is a strong control of the state, it would be naïve to think that a new ruling house will automatically promote its dialect to a national status. For multiple and various reasons that have to do with legitimization process, cultural prestige, or the importance of the bureaucratic tradition, different choices could be made. Late Egyptian is a case in point: although the new dynasty has undoubtedly a Theban origin, the contrasting features with MEG rather point to a dialect that was nested somewhere around the Memphite area.

The place of origin for the would-be national languages is still a matter of debate. Since the pioneering study of Hintze (1947), almost everything has been proposed. Table 2 is a summary of the main proposals (after Kammerzell 1998: 46–47, with some supplements).

As a final word, I would like to stress the importance of the moments of greater political instability (the so-called Intermediate Periods) as periods of intense activity for trying new paradigms (sometimes stillborn ones) or giving a second chance to old ones. This obviously rather reinforces the connections already postulated between the changes of standard languages and the political (r)evolutions of Egypt.

⁷² As shown by the substitution of abnormal hieratic in the South with Demotic at the dawn of the Saite dynasty.

		OEg	MEg	LEg	Dem.
Hintze (1947)	Area Memphis				
	Area Theben				
Edgerton (1951)	Delta/Heliopolis				
	Area Saqqarah				
	Herakleopolis/Theben				
Edel (1955/1964)	Lower Egypt				
	Upper Egypt				
Fecht (1960)	Lower Egypt				
	Upper Egypt				
Davies (1973)	Lower Egypt				
	Middle Egypt				
	Upper Egypt				
Schenkel (1990)	Area W				
	Area X				
Zeidler (1992)	Area/Sociolect Y				
	Area/Sociolect Z				
Satzinger (1994)	Middle Egypt				
	Other areas				
Gundacker (2010)					
	South (Theban)				
Allen (2013)	North				
	South				
Winand (here)	North				
	South				

Table 2. Places of origin for pre-Coptic Egyptian dialects. A sample of scholarly propositions (adapted from Kammerzell 1998: 46)

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