

Understanding the Egyptian Lexicon with(out) Comparison

Rethinking the Origins

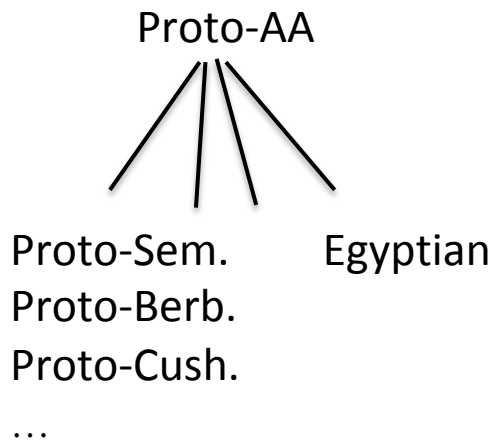
Brown University, 14 April 2018

Jean Winand (University of Liège)

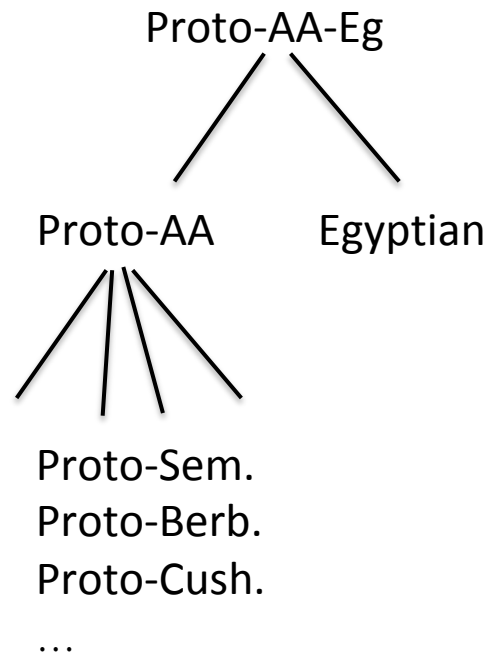
Captatio benevolentiae

- I have been dealing with Egyptian lexicon for some time, but with two important caveat's
 - my choice field of expertise is Late Egyptian, which is not attested before the 18th dyn. (ca. 1550 BC), with some occasional interest in earlier periods
 - I have never been really preoccupied by Afro-Asiatic (hence AA) comparison

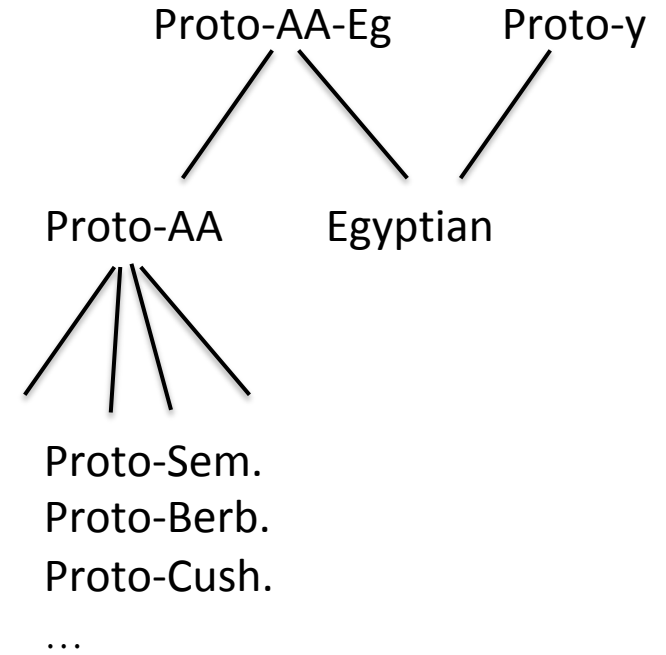
Prolegomenon



Model A
(AA Hypothesis)

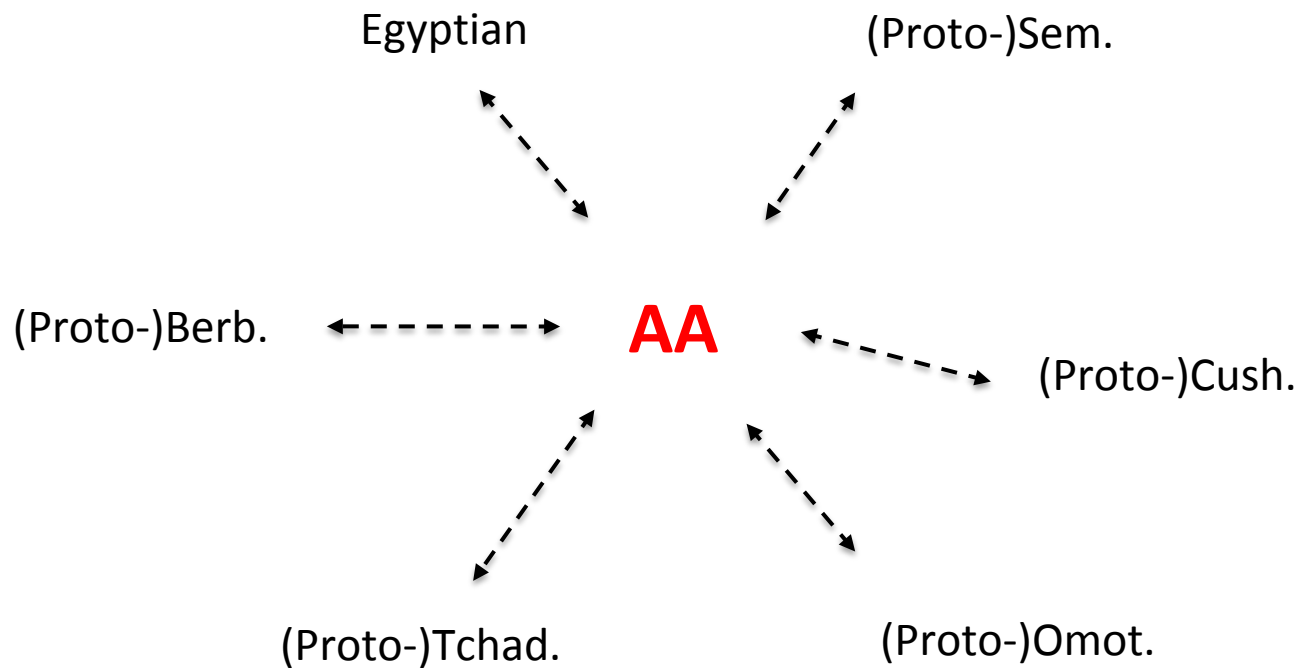


Model B



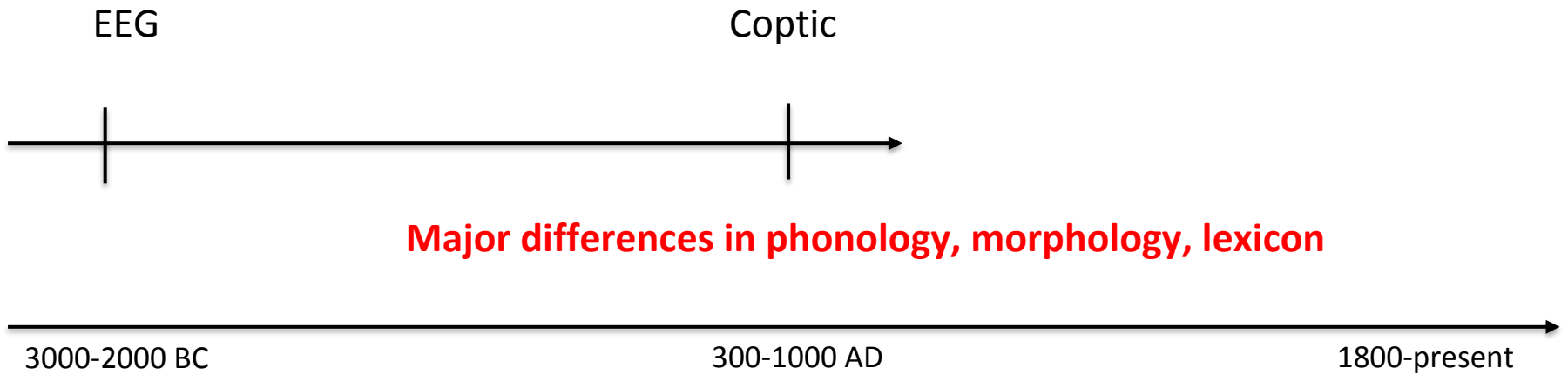
Model C

Prolegomenon

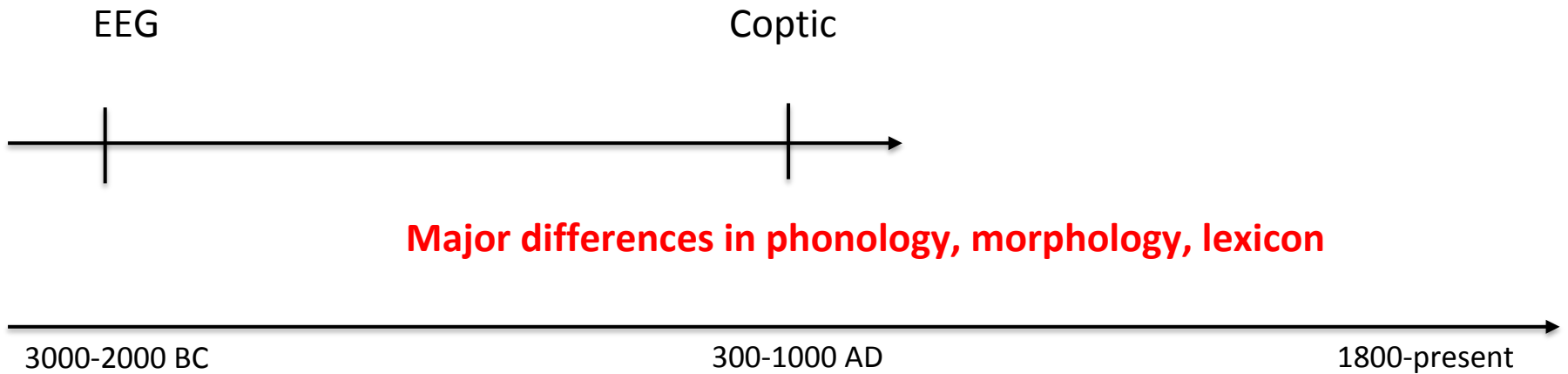


Model D

Some basic facts



Some basic facts

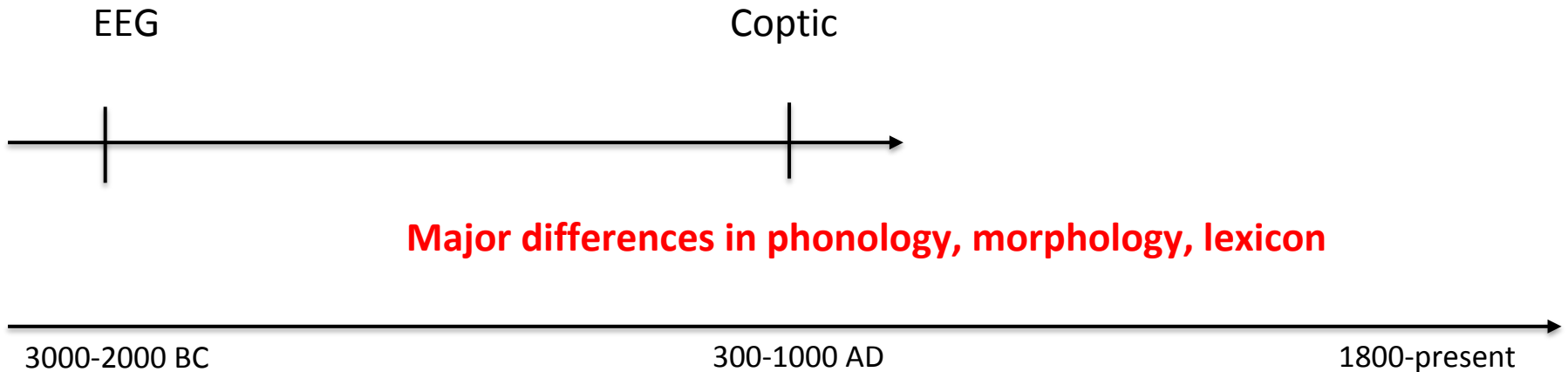


Major differences in phonology, morphology, lexicon

Phonology

- drastic reduction in plosives
- elimination of the emphatics, laryngals

Some basic facts



Major differences in phonology, morphology, lexicon

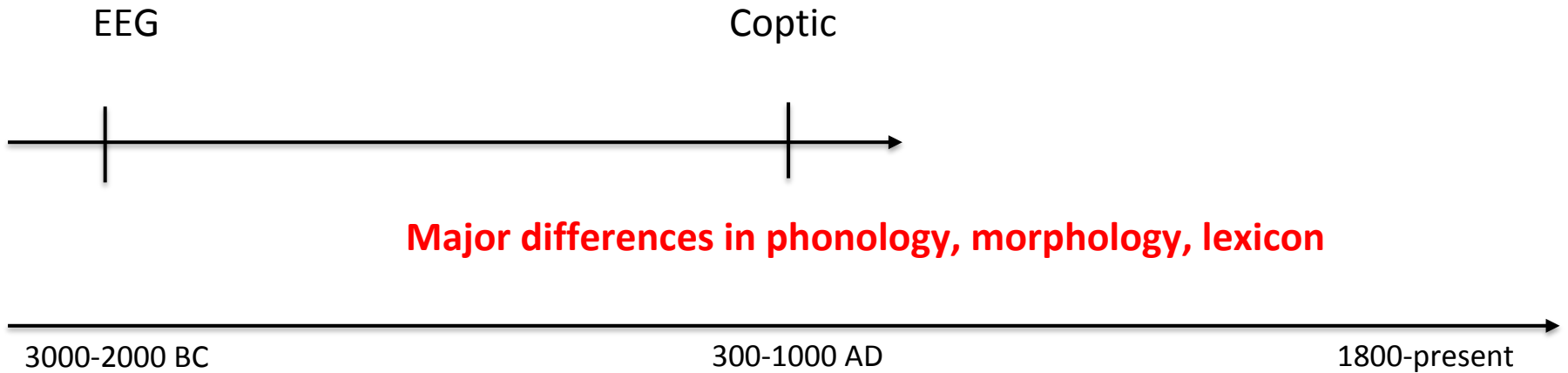
Morphology

- from more than 20 suffix conjugation patterns to (almost) **zero in Coptic**
- neutralisation of the inflections of the PsP
- nominal endings : $\dot{h}m.t=f > t\beta j=f s-hme$
- ...

LEg sequential form ($jw=f \dot{h}r tm s\dot{d}m$)

- innovation of LEg
- disappeared around 700 BC

Some basic facts



Major differences in phonology, morphology, lexicon

Lexicon

- Major changes in the lexicon (*m33* > *ptr* > *nw*; *pr* > *ʕ.wj*)
- Major changes in the semantic organisation of the verbal lexemes
- ...

wh3

①



[motion]



[abstract]

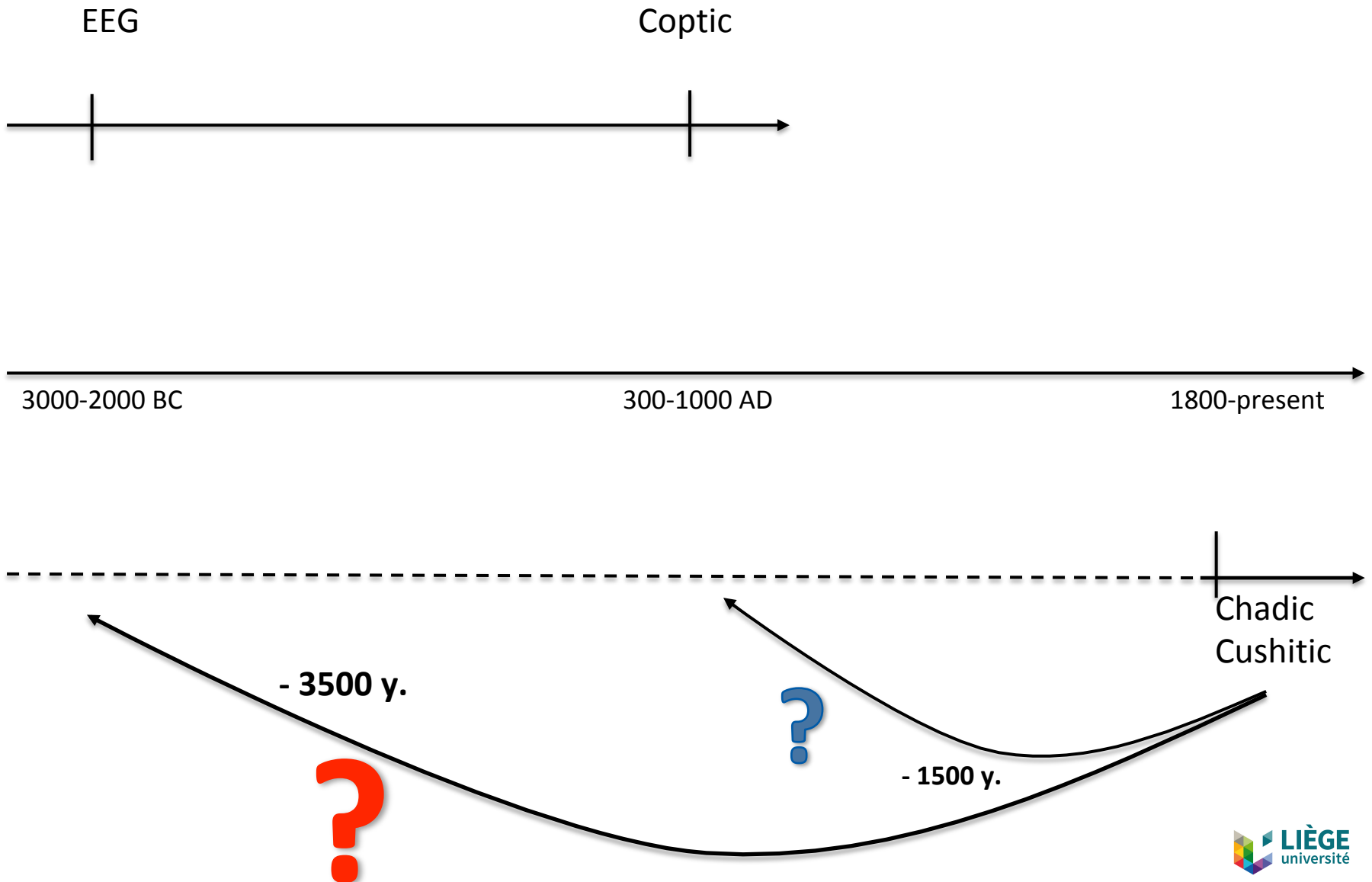
②



[intellect]

[psych feeling]

Some basic facts



Methodology

1. **select languages one suspects they are related (assumed subjectivity),**
2. **select words that *a priori* seem to be connected semantically and phonologically,**
3. **eliminate loanwords,**
4. **give the priority to the oldest forms,**
5. **isolate the core/original meaning, which will be subsequently used for comparison,**
6. **make evident the semantic links that connect words coming from different languages,**
7. **explain how the meaning attached to the reconstructed AA proto-lexemes has been identified,**
8. **finally, assess plainly the phonological correspondences.**

Methodology

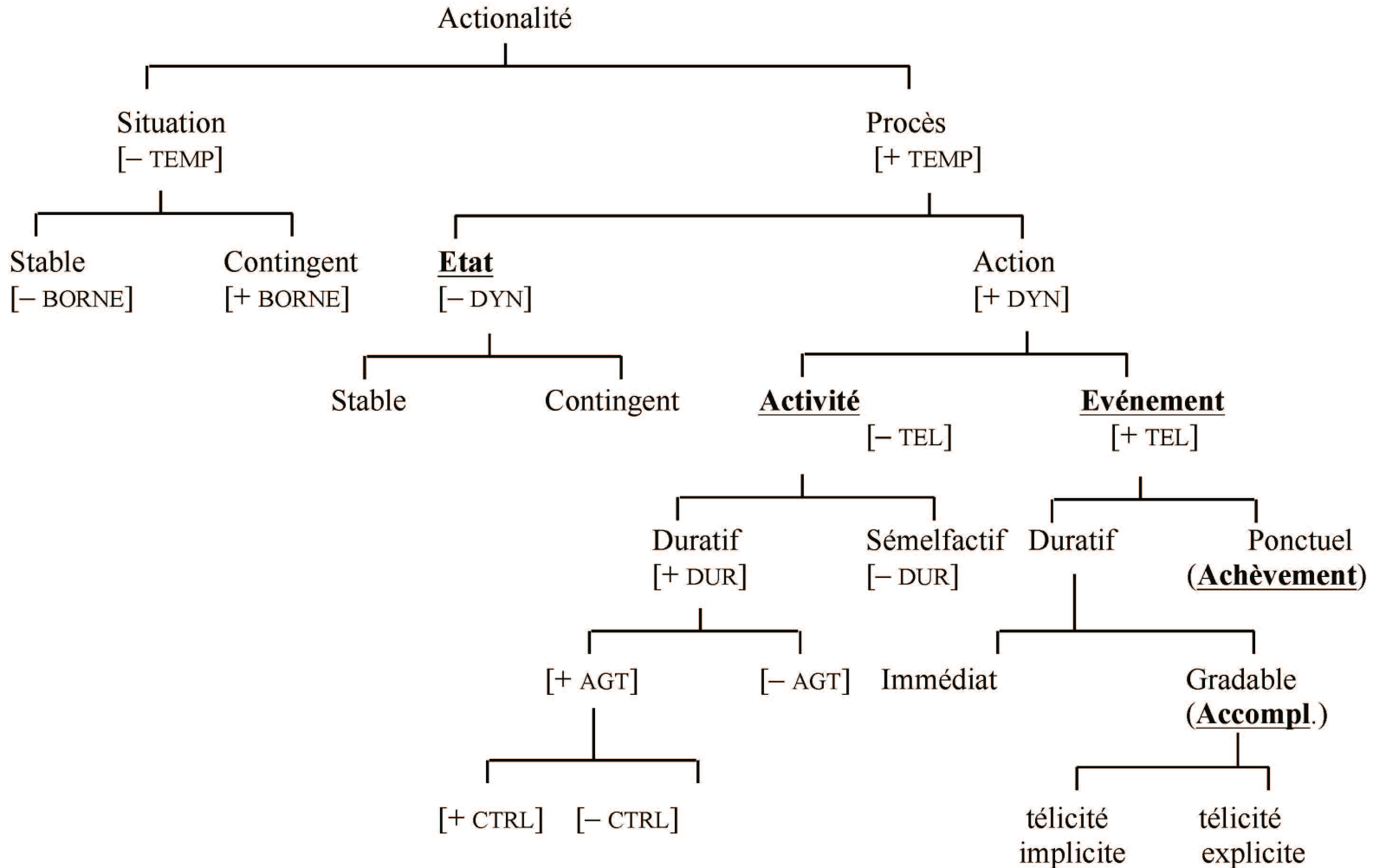
1. select languages one suspects they are related (assumed subjectivity),
2. select words that *a priori* seem to be connected semantically and phonologically,
3. eliminate loanwords,
4. give the priority to the oldest forms,
5. isolate the core/original meaning, which will be subsequently used for comparison,
6. make evident the semantic links that connect words coming from different languages,
7. explain how the meaning attached to the reconstructed AA proto-lexemes has been identified,
8. finally, assess plainly the phonological correspondences.

Ehret-#	Proto-AA	Egyptian	Remarks
8	*-boḥ “to go away”	<i>bḥn</i> “to drive off” <i>bḥs</i> “to hunt”	the semantic link is very elusive; actually <i>bḥn</i> means “cut off” (cf. the knife classifier); <i>bḥs</i> is not attested before the NK
11	<i>bāk</i> “to burn, shine”	<i>bk3</i> “morrow” <i>bk3</i> “to be bright”	the core meaning of <i>bk3</i> is rather “be pregnant”, the connection with the birth of the sun, and hence to the morning is secondary
18	<i>bîn/bân</i> “to beget”	<i>bnn</i> “to beget”	<i>bnn</i> and <i>bnbn</i> are usually derived from a common root
32	<i>bâayn</i> “grindstone”	<i>bnbn</i> “sacred stone”	
21-23		<i>brk</i> , <i>brg</i> , <i>brḳ</i>	probably Semitic loanwords
24	<i>bâs</i> “to start off”	<i>bs(j)</i> “to introduce”	1/ the semantic link is far from clear, 2/ as shown by Kruchten, the original meaning is the passing from one world to another; the sense of initiating, introducing someone in a new office is a late, secondary development
38	<i>baṣ</i> “to sit”	<i>bṣnw</i> “mounting”	1/ the semantic link completely eludes me, 2/ there is no word <i>bṣnw</i> , a word <i>bṣn</i> is attested in the NK, which means a kind of inlaying of precious stones, hence mounting, but this has nothing to do with “what a statue, etc. sits on” (Ehret), 3/ it has every chance to be a loanword
42	<i>pâḥ</i> “to take into the mouth”	Coptic <i>pôhs</i> “to bite”	the verb is originally <i>pzh</i> .
45	<i>pil</i> “to drive, chase”	<i>prj</i> “to go out, escape”	the verb means “go out”, not “escape”; the semantic link is far from evident. the two <i>prj</i> are of course one single verb; the meaning go up is only metaphorical for the ascending of the dead king to the sun. <i>pr.t</i> is obviously derived from <i>prj</i> “to go out”. for the derivation of <i>prš</i> , see <i>infra</i> , §4.
51	<i>pîr</i> “to fly”	<i>prj</i> “to go up”	
85	<i>fir</i> “flower”	<i>pr.t</i> “fruit” <i>prš</i> “to blow”	
52	<i>poor</i> “to speak”	<i>pry</i> “utterance” (LEg)	seems to be a shadow word; if it exists, should be linked to <i>prj</i> “go out”, cf. the expression “ <i>pr.t-r-ḥrw</i> ”
53	<i>pas</i> “to light up”	<i>psj</i> , <i>fsj</i> “to cook”	I failed to see the semantic connection
57	<i>pax</i> “to bend”	<i>pḥr</i> “to turn, to revolve”	I cannot see how to connect bending and revolving
60	<i>pa?</i> “to spit out”	<i>p3j</i> “to spurt”	seems to be a shadow word
64	<i>pûṣ</i> “to spill out”	<i>pṣpṣ</i> “to drop (calf)”	1/ the word is a hapax, with the moving legs classifier; the sense of dropping is far from established, 2/ the link of this supposed meani with “to spill out” is far from self-evident.

Word	Trans	Intrans	Caus	Gloss
<i>3b</i>	avoid, cease	tarry, stay	<i>s:3b</i>	make to tarry
<i>3bh</i>	unite	mingle, be merged	--	
<i>3m</i>	burn up	burn (of brazier)	<i>s:3m</i>	burn up
<i>3s</i>	hurry, hasten (self)	hurry, flow fast	--	
<i>3d</i>	attack	be savage	--	
<i>j^cb</i>	join (someone)	be united	--	
<i>jbj</i>	thirst after (s'thing)	be thirsty	--	
<i>jnk</i>	collect	come together (persons)	--	
<i>jsk</i>	hinder	linger	--	
<i>w3h</i>	set, lay down	live long, endure	<i>s:w3h</i>	make to endure
<i>w^cb</i>	cleanse, purify	purify (oneself)	<i>s:^cb/ s:w^cb</i>	to cleanse, purify
<i>w^hd</i>	be patient (with s'one)	be painful, suffer	<i>s:w^hd</i>	to harm someone*
<i>wsš</i>	urinate	pass fluid	--	
<i>wstn</i>	deal arbitrarily with	travel freely	--	
<i>wš</i>	desolate (a place)	be destroyed	--	
<i>w^d</i>	pilot (s'one)	act as pilot	<i>s:w^d</i>	hand over, pass on
<i>b3k</i>	carry out (task)	work	--	
<i>b^ch^j</i>	flood, inundate	be inundated	<i>s:b^ch^j*</i>	spout in overflow
<i>bs</i>	introduce	enter (office)	--	
<i>b^t</i>	abandon, forsake	run	<i>s:b^t*</i>	laugh mockingly
<i>ps^h</i>	disarray (hair)	be distraught	--	
<i>fh</i>	loose, release	set out, depart	<i>s:fh</i>	lose, loosen
<i>m33</i>	see	look on, at	<i>s:m33*</i>	cause to see
<i>m3^c</i>	lead, guide	set out (journey)	<i>s:m3^c</i>	put in order
<i>mn</i>	establish	be firm, established	<i>s:mn</i>	make firm
<i>mnj</i>	moor (ship)	die	--	
<i>m^h</i>	fill	be full, complete	--	
<i>m^h3</i>	match, equal	be like	<i>s:m^h3*</i>	correct (document)
<i>mtr</i>	testify concerning	be famous, renowned	<i>s:mtr</i>	bear witness, examine
<i>mdw</i>	address (s'one)	speak	--	

- For the majority of the verbs listed, one of the alleged use is late, rare or non-existent!
- As regards Egyptian, these lists are mostly based on old fashioned dictionaries without any philological insight
- There are differences in the actionality of the verbs listed:
 - verbs of motion (telic or atelic)
 - verbs of state
 - verbs of quality
- These differences can explain particular behaviours, esp. changes in the core argumental structure (addition, deletion, syntactic modifications ...),

... which can of course affect the verbal diathesis.



Taxinomy of verbal actionality (Winand 2006)

Bi- or tri-radicalism?

- Since the last quarter of the last century, attempts have been made to reconstruct the basic root consonantal system (esp. in Semitic) with a bi-consonantal primary cluster, eventually extended to a third consonant.
 - Ehret (1989) suggests that the 3rd consonant is semantically motivated,
 - the systematic attribution of semantic features to the third extended consonant makes the system incredibly complex
 - according to Bohas (1991, 1999), the Semitic (at least Arabic) lexicon is organized in a three-level system: a matrix, an etymon (always bi-consonantal), and a root
 - these views against original tri-consonantal roots are not universally accepted (Zanned 2005)
 - unfortunately, the issue is rarely discussed in recent general presentations (see e.g. Frajzyngier & Shay 2012)

Bi- or tri-radicalism?

- The Egyptian data support the hypothesis that a number of tri-radical stems can be analysed as basically two-consonantal roots with an expansion (e.g. Breyer, Winand 1985):
 - P + R [split] : *prs*
prd
pr_d
prš
p_rt
...

Envoi !

- the collection of data (but should be refined, be more reliable)
- the reconstruction of some phonological correspondences (but far from a general agreement)
- the reconstruction of root patterns (but with problems: bi-, tr-radicalism)
- proposals on how to organise the languages families in some genetic way, and how to fix an absolute chronology (but no agreement between “schools”)
- the production of more or less extensive lists: dictionaries of AA roots, etymological dictionaries, etc. (but much criticism on what has been produced so far)
- attempts at reconstructing the cultural and societal background by using the lexicon: Militarev 2009, Ehret 2011 (but seems premature)
- attempts at reconstructing larger entities: Nostratic (from proto-something to Ur-proto-something ?)

Is there anything like Afro-Asiatic?
How to place Ancient Egyptian?

“Are these question legitimate?”

YES

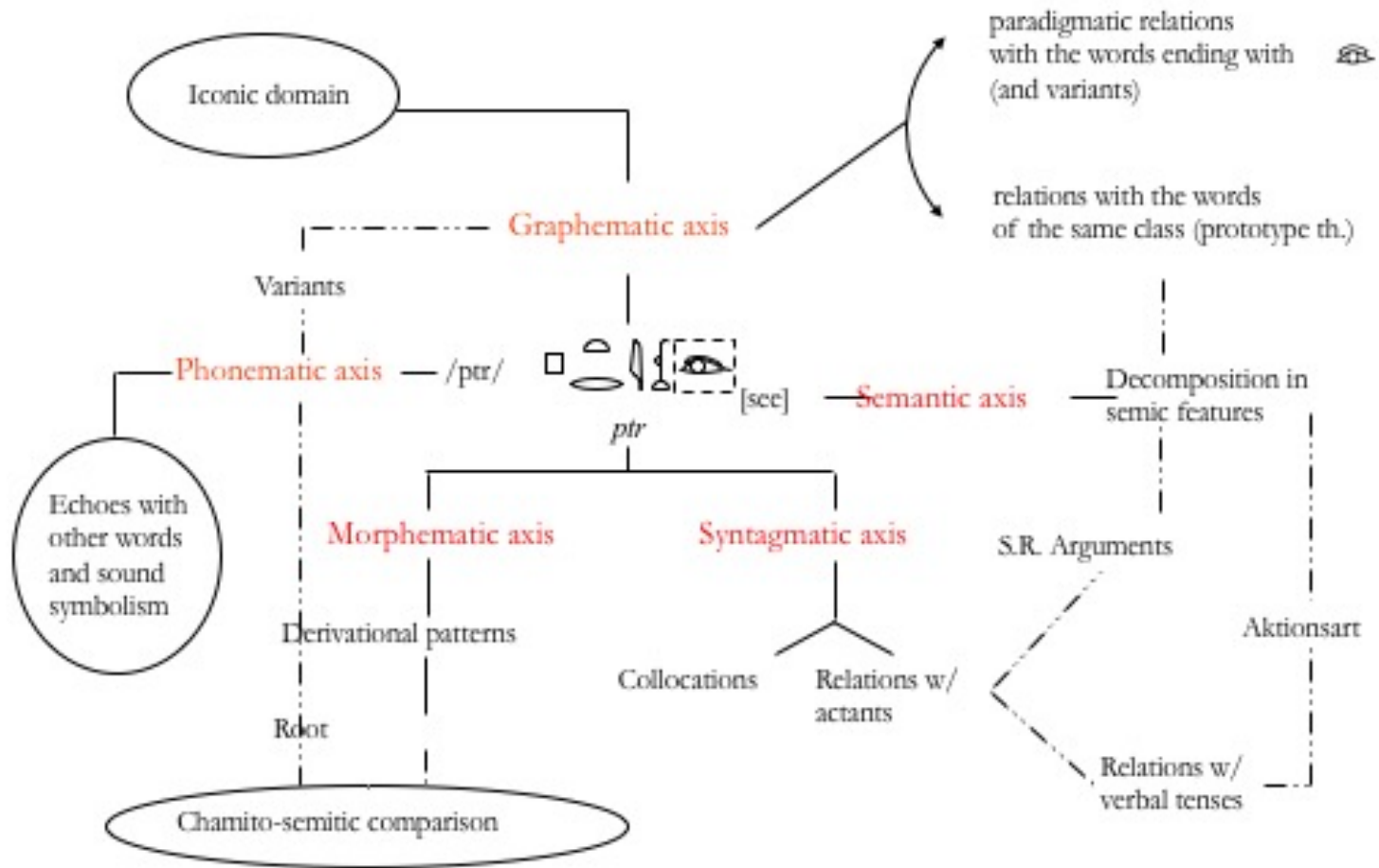
“Can we handle this **properly now**?”

Probably, NO
(at least for lexicon)



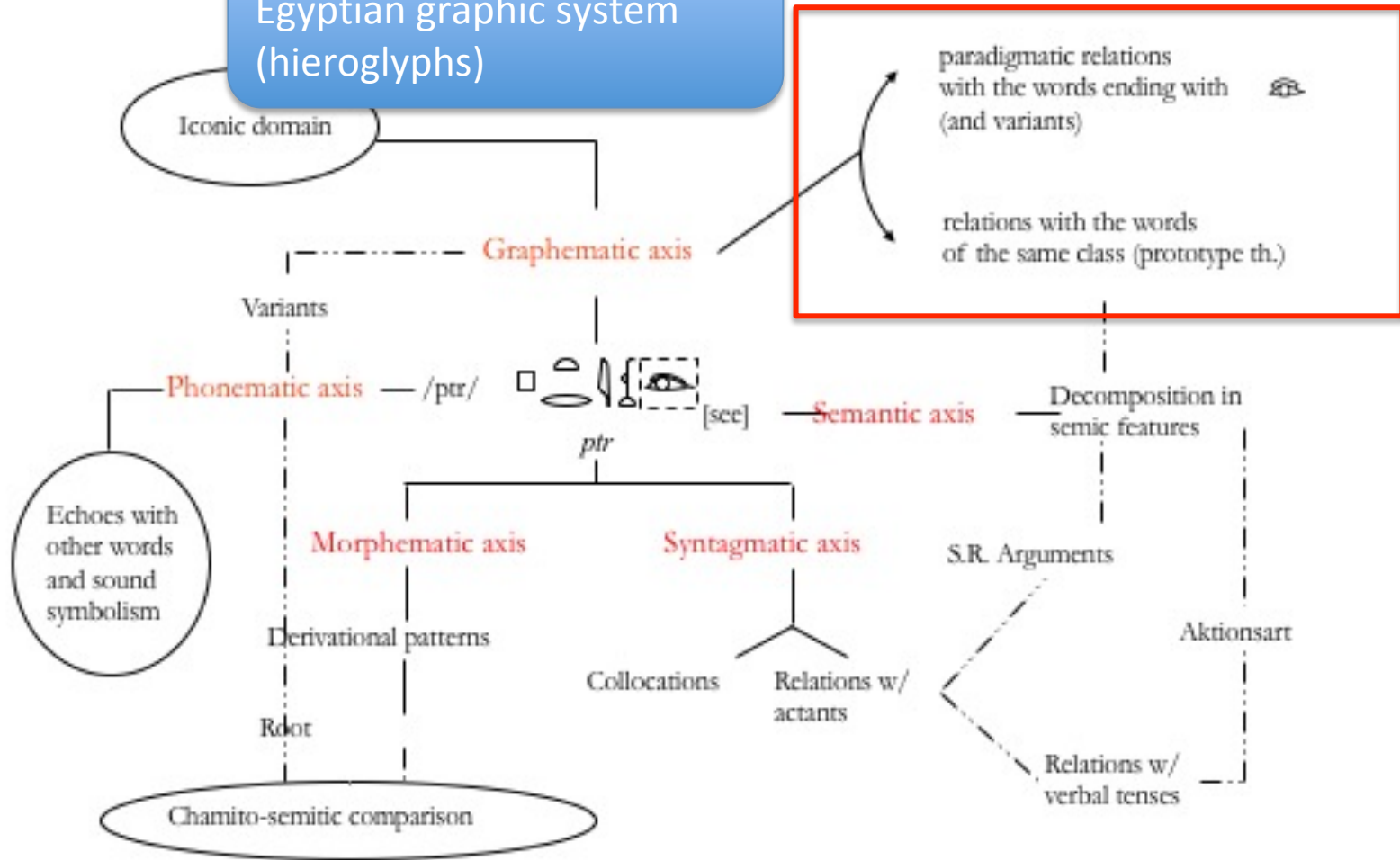
Lexical semantics in ancient Egyptian



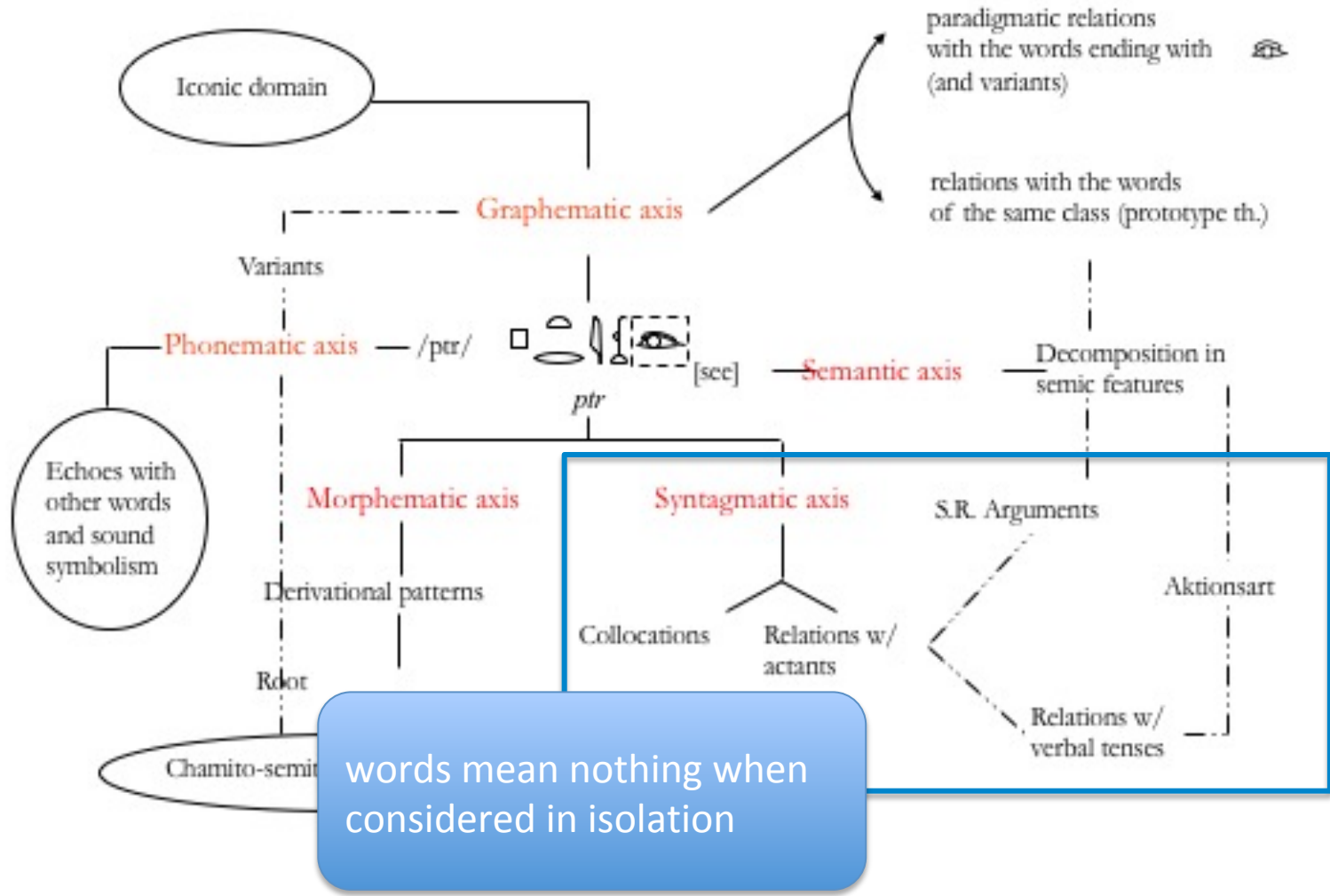


The Semantic Trail exemplified by the verb *ptr* "see" (Polis & Winand 2015).

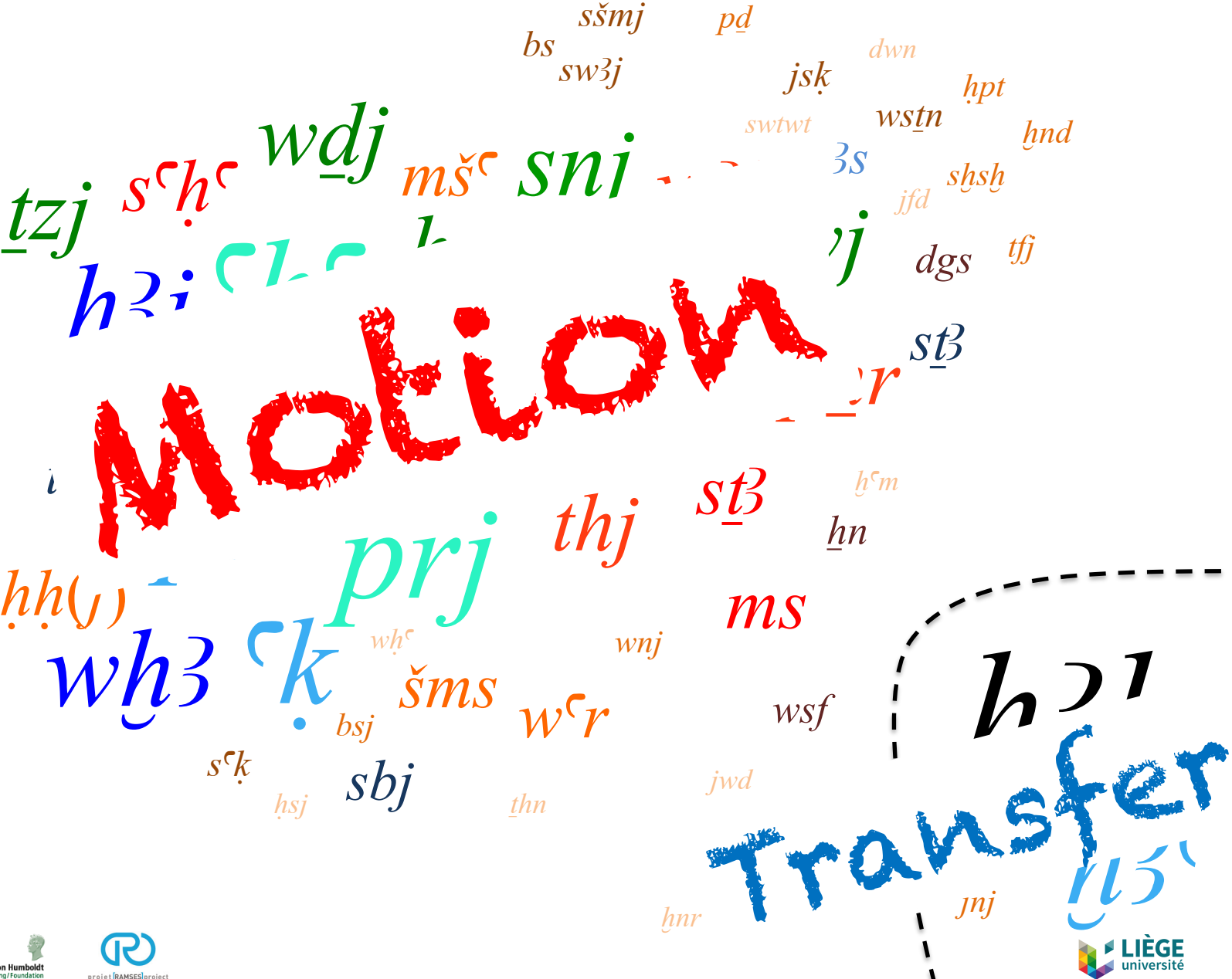
taking advantage of the Egyptian graphic system (hieroglyphs)

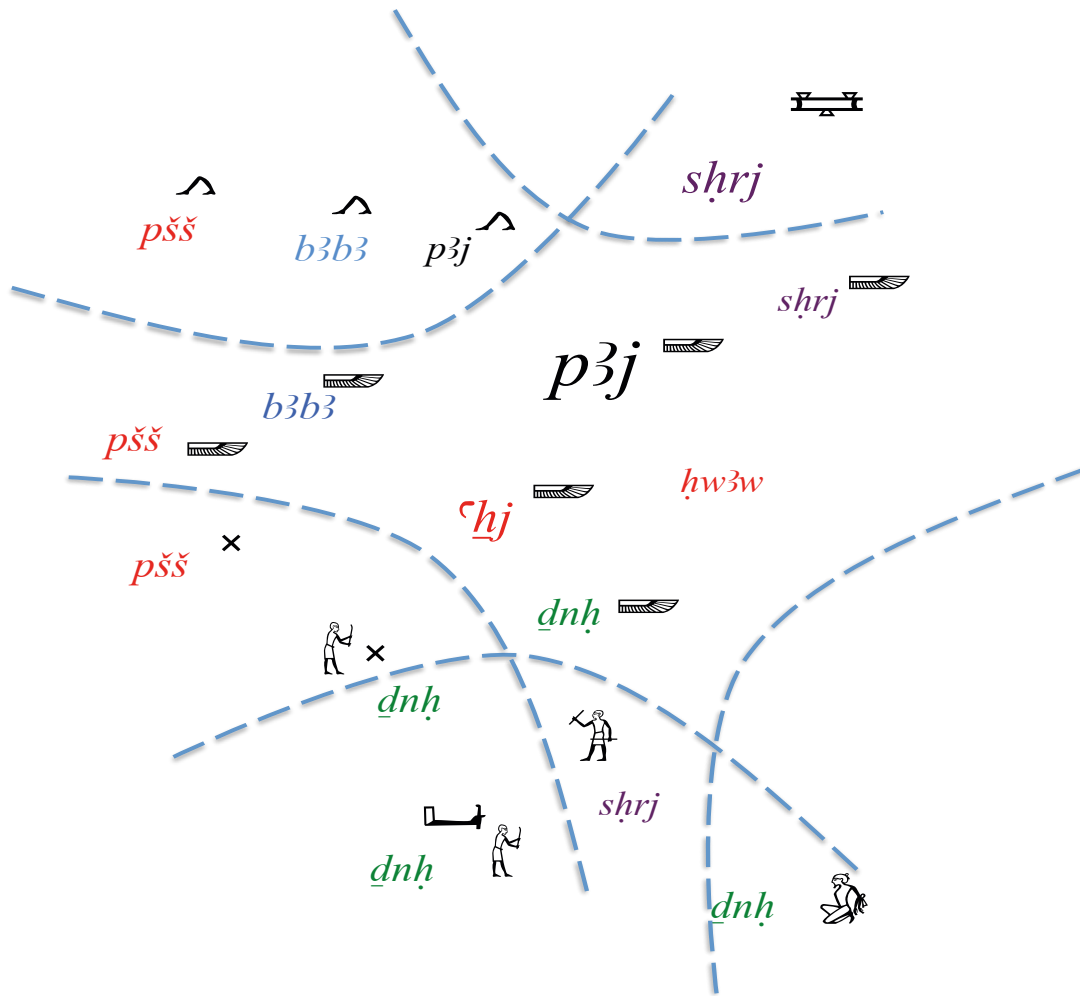


The Semantic Trail exemplified by the verb *ptr* "see" (Polis & Winand 2015).



verbs with $\Delta \geq 10$ occurrences





Graphic representation of VoM that can have  as semantic classifier.

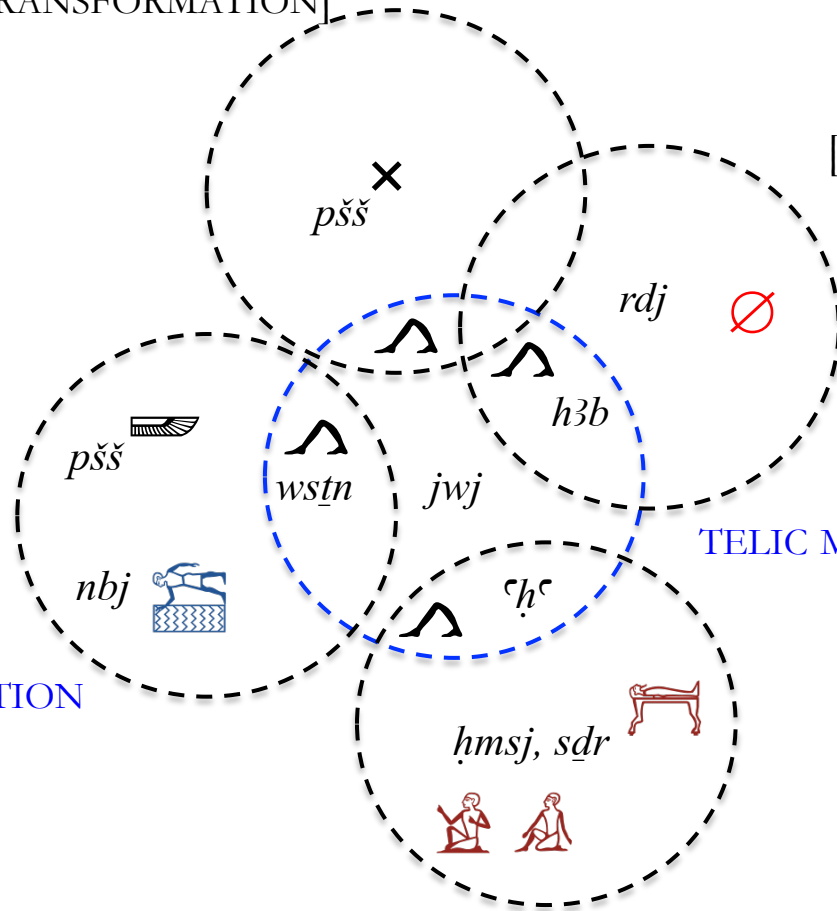
[TRANSFORMATION]

[TRANSFER]

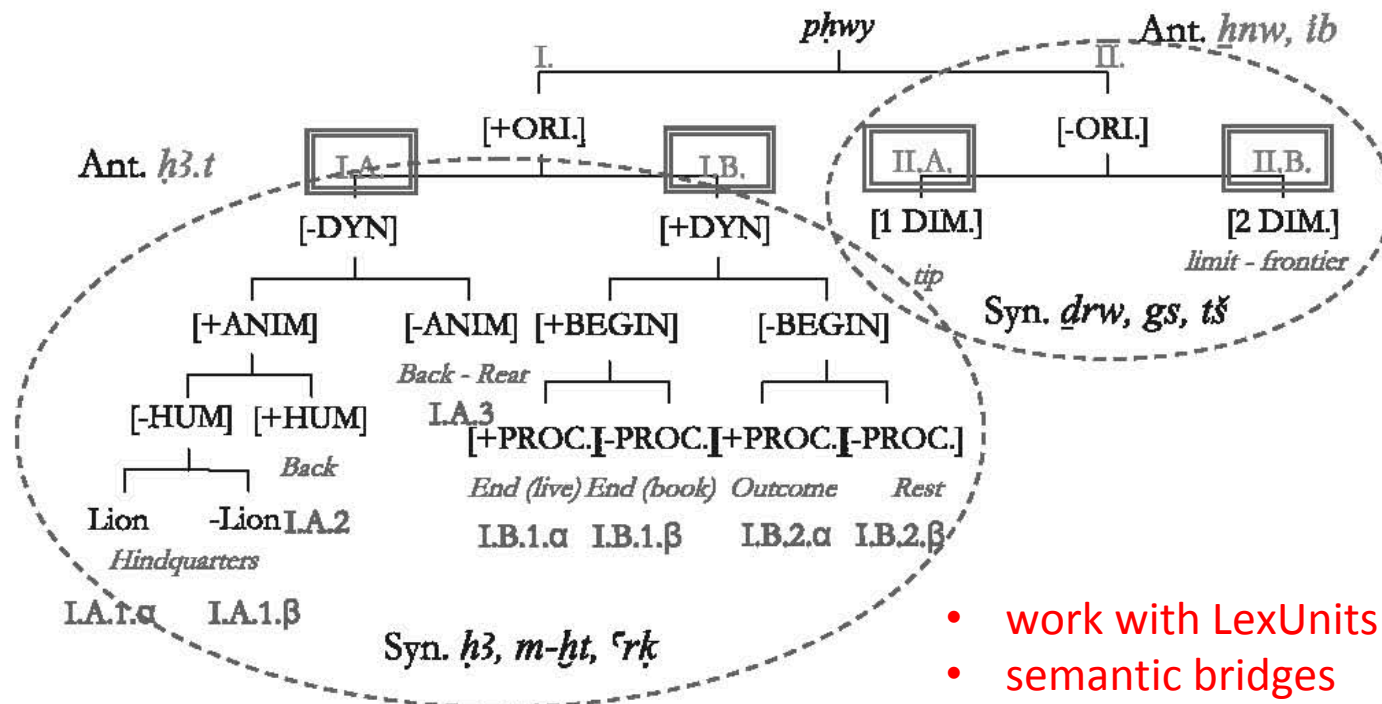
ATELIC MOTION

TELIC MOTION

[POSITION]

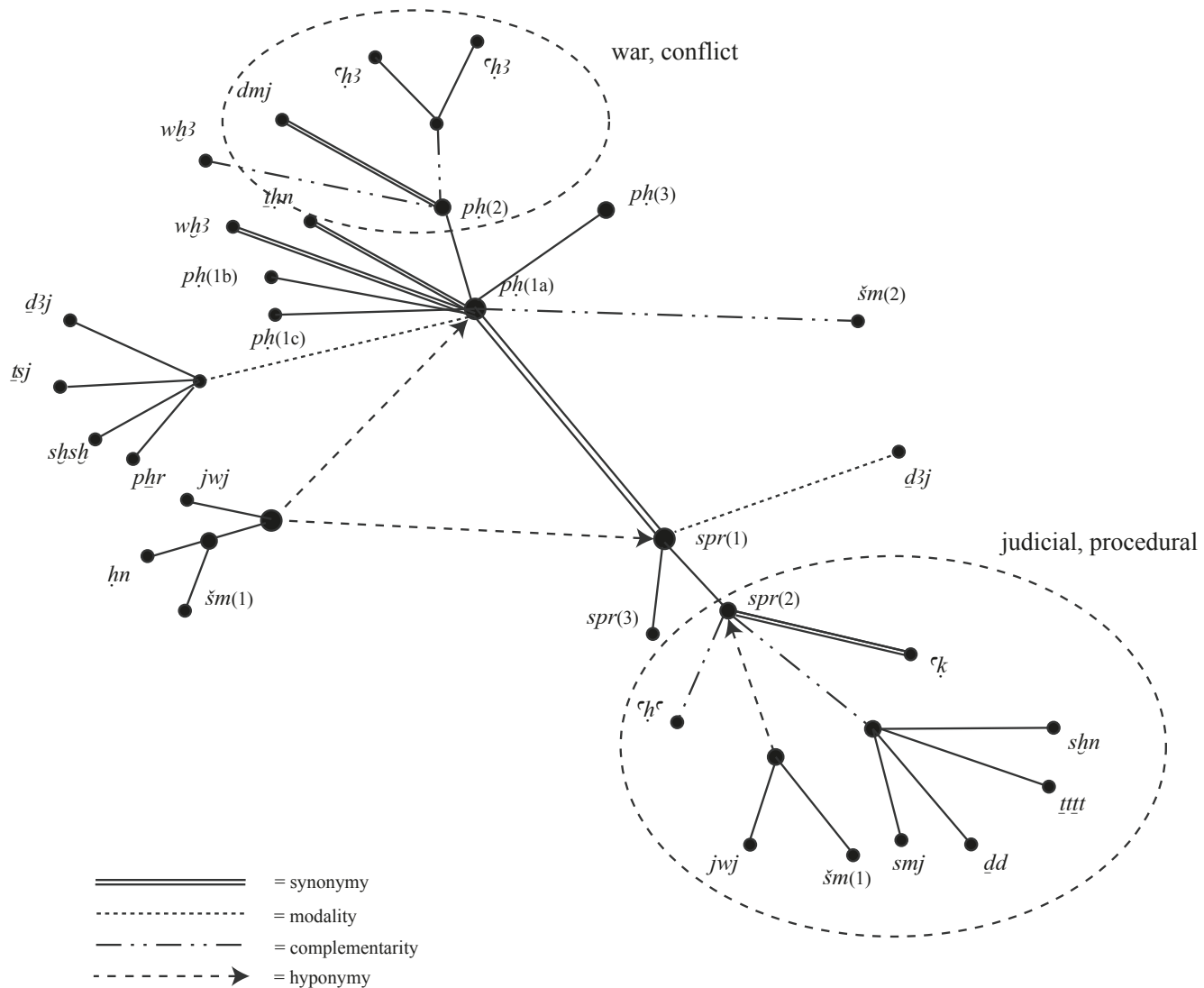


What can we really do with this kind
of emic evidence (Volksetymologie?) ?



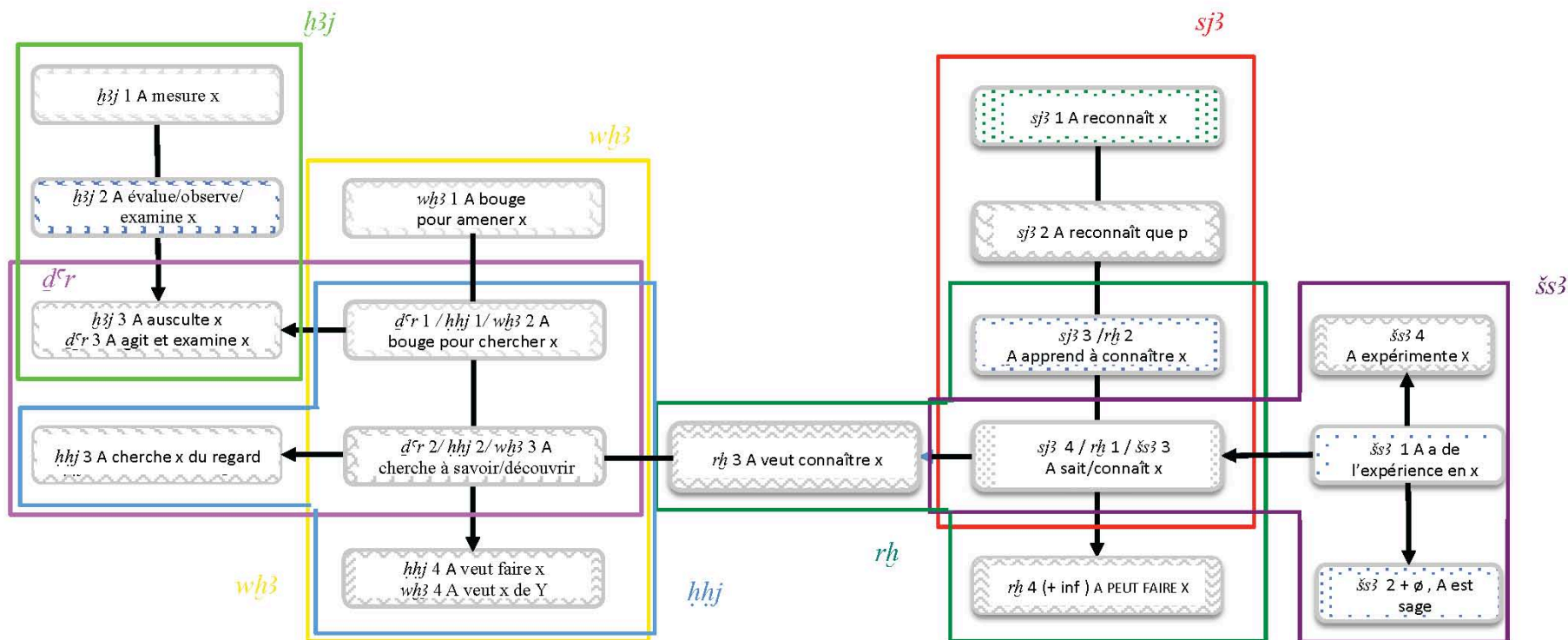
- work with LexUnits
- semantic bridges
- take into account a semantic field (synonyms, antonyms, meronyms, etc)
- semantic typology?

The semantic organisation of *phwy* (after Polis-Winand 2015 : 1510)



Graphic representation of the semantic relations connecting the LexUnits of *ph* and *spr* to other verbs

Semantic maps involving some verbs of cognition (Winand 2016)



- basically synchronic
- but with some diachronical vectors

“One of the greatest hindrances to the reconstruction of Proto-Afro-Asiatic has been the difficulty of establishing clear cognate sets across the vocabularies of the several branches (this has also, of course, impeded efforts to establish sound correspondences across the branches and to reconstruct Proto-Afro-Asiatic phonology). Essentially, this must await the working out of reconstructed proto-vocabularies for the individual branches, which is still in its beginning stages, except for Semitic.”

(J. Huehnergard)

“Pour le comparatisme dans le domaine des langues afro-asiatiques, la conclusion semble être qu’en ce qui concerne le lexique, la comparaison doit s’effectuer sur les étymons et les matrices et non pas sur les racines triconsonantiques. En d’autres termes, qu’avant de comparer, il faut commencer par dégager les étymons et les matrices dans chaque langue.”

(G. Bohas)

“EDAL (*Etymological Dictionary of the Altaic Languages*) is a full scale demonstration that the Altaic hypothesis has failed, although the main goal of this grandiose publication was just the opposite: to prove to the outside world that the Altaic language family exists and that five language families included into this tentative stock are all genetically related. I really feel indebted to EDAL' s authors for their massive effort to provide such a bulk of non-evidence for Altaic conveniently collected in one place for those of us who humbly disagree with the authors' main premise”.

(A. Vovin 2005: 72-73)



Geluck, *Le Chat*, Brussels, 1986

*Il ne faut pas mettre la charrue
avant les bœufs*

(proverbe français)