Lost in translation
Understanding the verbal predication in Egyptian

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Aspect: some typological considerations

• Languages that have no grammaticalized aspectual system of oppositions (GASO), but with various possibilities of expressing aspect (some dedicated, but optional, constructions, like the so-called French progressive; aspectual auxiliaries, aspectual adverbs, etc);

• Languages that have a partial GASO; this is the case of English, for instance, which contrasts progressive and non-progressive aspect;
Languages that have a complete GASO, that is a system which is pervasive in all inflected forms. This is the case with some Semitic languages (with limitations), Russian, ancient Greek

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Imperfective</th>
<th>Perfective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>я читаю</td>
<td>я прочитываю</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futur</td>
<td>я буду читать</td>
<td>я прочитаю</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>я читал(а)</td>
<td>я прочитал(а)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitive</td>
<td>читать</td>
<td>прочитать</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>читай</td>
<td>прочитай</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participle</td>
<td>читающий</td>
<td>прочитавший</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- to read
- to read (till the end)
• Aspect can also be “guided” by the nature, the form, the grammatical expression of the verbal arguments:

I drink coffee  vs.  I am drinking a very delicious cup of coffee;

πίνειν ὑδρο (acc.)  vs.  πίνειν ὑδατος (gen.)
пить воду (acc.)  vs.  пить воды (gen.)
Formal differences

• languages where aspect is part of the flexional system: Semitic languages (كتبت katab-tu vs. أكتب 'aktubu), ancient Greek (λύω, ἔλυσα, λέλυκα with some peculiarities)
Formal differences

- languages where aspect is conveyed by prefixes that can trigger a semantic change of the meaning:
  - Russian
    - **мотреть** “see, look”
    - **читать** “read”
    - **подсчитывать** “calculate”
    - **смотреть** “(have a) look”
    - **прочитать** “read”
    - **подсчитать** “calculate”
Formal differences

• languages where aspect is conveyed by a complementary mix of different verbal lexemes: ancient Greek suppletive/defective verbs (λέγω, εἶπον, εἴρηκα);

• languages where basic verbal lexemes can be modified according to a set of fixed rules of derivational morphology, which triggers semantic changes and a selection of some potential aspectual combinations:
  • classical Arabic (kataba “write” vs. kattaba “write often, have an epistolary exchange with”)
Ancient Egyptian: a quick overview

- time line, linguistic changes, and writing systems
- Earlier Egyptian: aspectual system
- aspect as a global semantic category
- relevance of actionality
- relevance of the argument structure
The aspectual system of Middle Egyptian

- **perfective**
  - non-extensive
  - extensive (resultative)

- **imperfective**
  - non-extensive (progressive)
  - extensive

- **Verbs**
  - *sdm.n=j*
  - *jw sdm.n=j*
  - *jw= j sdm=j*
  - *jw= j h r s dm*
  - *jw= j jj.kwj*

- **Examples**
  - I heard
  - I have heard
  - I (can) hear
  - I am listening
  - I have come
"if you examine someone who is suffering from the stomach and who also occasionally suffers from the arm" (pEbers)
Aspect as a global semantic category

• Aspect in ancient Egyptian can be conveyed by different means:
  • grammaticalized aspectual system of oppositions (GASO);
  • semi-grammaticalized aspectual auxiliary verbs: ãh “to stand up”, ḫmsj “to sit down” and sdr “to lay down”, fully developed in Late Egyptian (for progressive, inchoative, and resultative), and ḫpr “to come into existence” (for inchoative);
  • aspectual auxiliary verbs: š3 “start”, kn “finish, end”;
  • adverbs: m-mnt “everyday”, m-dwn “continuously”;
  • situation adverbs, like 3 and dy “here”;
  • grammatical expression of the 2nd argument.
Aspect as a global semantic category

• Expression of aspect in ancient Egyptian can be suggested by:
  • the definiteness, the number of an argument:
    • $rmt\  nb$ “everyone” $\rightarrow$ generic statement (imperfective)
  • the actionality (Aktionsart) of the verbal lexeme
Classes of actionality and aspect

Major criteria

[± DURATIVITY]    [± DYNAMICITY]    [± TELICITY]

Secondary criteria

[± BOUND]    [± CONTROL]

Also worth noting

Possibility of having a pre- and/or a post-phase, which can take the aspectual attribute [± DYNAMICITY]
Taxonomy of verbal actionality in ancient Egyptian (Winand 2006)
Classes of actionality and aspect

Aspect as a phasal selection

\[ \langle \ldots \rangle + \rangle \]

[ + DUR]  [ + DYN]  [ + TEL]  (accomplishments)

global : he regularly writes a letter to his wife

inchoative : he began to write a letter to his wife

progressive : he was writing a letter to his wife when the phone rang

completive : last week, he wrote a letter to his wife

resultative : he has written a beautiful letter to his wife
Classes of actionality and aspect

\[
jn-jw \text{ wrš=} n \ hr \ f3(j).t \ jt \ hn^c \ bd.t \ hd.t
\]
Are we going to spend the day carrying barley and white spelt?
(Paheri, pl. III, 4\textsuperscript{th} reg., lines 3-4)

\[
f3j \text{ “carry” } [+ \text{ DUR}] [+ \text{ DYN}] [- \text{ TEL}]
\]
in progressive > no change in meaning

\[
wrš=j \ jm \ hr \ j3š \ n \ nty \ m \ š3
\]
I spend the day calling the one who is in the lake (\textit{Fishing pleasures}, B III, 5)

\[
j3š \text{ “shout a cry” } [- \text{ DUR}] [+ \text{ DYN}] [- \text{ TEL}]
\]
in progressive > keep shouting, calling
Classes of actionality and aspect

Aspect selections are conditioned by actionality classes
Classes of actionality and aspect:
Pre- and post-phases

$mwt$ “die” $[-\text{DUR}] [-\text{DYN}] [+\text{TEL}]$

Pre-phase $[+\text{DUR}] [\approx\text{DYN}] [-\text{CTRL}]$

Post-phase $[+\text{DUR}] [-\text{DYN}]$

$\text{Goal}$

$[\text{DIE}]$

$[\text{BE DEAD}]$

$t\beta\ h\beta.s.t\ hr\ mwt\ n\ h\kappa r$
(Semnah Disp.)

$sw\ mwt.w$ (pBM 10052, 4,27)

$jw=f\ hr\ mw.t\ m-dj=f\ m\ 3bd\ 1$ (oAshmMus. 1933.810)

“the gebel is dying of hunger”

present I ($hr$ + inf.) - progressive

“he is dead”

present I (stative) – resultative perfect

“and it (the donkey) died in his possession on the 1\text{st} month”

sequential - perfective
Classes of actionality and aspect: Pre- and post-phases

The post-phase can be **dynamic**

\[ (+ \text{ TELIC}) \ [– \text{ DURATIVE}] \ [+] \text{ DYNAMIC} \]

\[ sw \, ſm.\, w \quad sw \, w^c\, r.\, w/wth.\, w \quad sw \, rs.\, w \]

he set to go \quad he ran away \quad he awoke

= he is on his way \quad = he is on the run \quad = he is conscious

\[ jst \, hftj \, nb \, w^c\, r.\, w \, hr \, nn \]

all the enemies were running away because of that (*Urk*. IV, 1311,10)
Classes of actionality and aspect: Pre- and post-phases

The post-phase can be **dynamic**

- ancient Greek
  
  τυφλὸς γὰρ ἐκ δεδορκότος
  “(for he will travel) as blind although he can see” (Soph., *Oed. Rex*, 454)

- dialectal Arabic
  
  *huwwa râkib ḥumâr*
  « he’s riding an ass »

- Russian (пошли ! Поехали !)
Relevance of the argument structure

1. Deletion of an argument

\( \text{šm r X “to go to X” [- DUR] [+ DYN] [+ TEL] } \)

with a valency reduction (\( \text{Dir > Ø} \)) : “to walk”

\( n(n) \text{šm=j Ø shd.kwj} \)

“I shall not walk upside down” (CT VI,287h)

\( \text{jnk rmt jwty jb=f, wrš (hr) šm m-s3 r3=j mj jh m-s3 smw} \)

“I am a stupid guy who spends the day walking after his mouth like a cow after some grass” (pAnastasi II, 10,7-11,1)
Relevance of the argument structure

2. Modification of the syntactic expression of an argument

\( wnm \ X \text{“to eat X” [+ DUR] [+ DYN] [+ TEL] } \)

with DirObj introduced by preposition \( m \) “in” > partitive

\( st \ hr \ wnm \ t3j=sn \ wnm.t \ m-mn.t \)

“they eat their food (lit. eatings) everyday” (pSallier I,4,8)

\( wnm=j \ m \ wnm.t=sn \)

“I feed myself of what they eat” (CT III,128p)
the object of the former \( wnm \) is introduced by \( m \), the latter is a direct object
Relevance of the argument structure

2. Modification of the syntactic expression of an argument

In LEdg, there is no longer a grammatical distinction between progressive and non-progressive (except for "he", hmsj, and sdr)

jrj X “to do X” [+ DUR] [+ DYN] [+ TEL]

with DirObj introduced by preposition m “in” > progressive

sw (hr) jr m p3j.f shn

“he is doing his job” (pTurin 1971, v° 6)
Cases of split transitivity

- *thj* — imperfective vs. perfective

- always transitive in Earlier Egyptian
- in Late Egyptian, two argument structures (DirObj and $r + NP$)
  - ObjDir = object totally affected
  - $r + NP$ = attempt to touch, conative meaning (detelicisation)
  - statistical correspondence between the ArgStr and grammatical aspect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earlier Eg.</th>
<th>DirObj</th>
<th>$r + NP$</th>
<th>Imperfective</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Egyptian</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>rare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>rare</td>
<td>OK</td>
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Some interesting examples:

*rh* “to learn, to know”

mk grt *rh.* *n=j* ḵd n ḥm. *jt=j*

“For I got to know the character of my father’s wife” (pBM 10549, r° 8-9)

*sk* *sw* *rh*(.) *w* ḥn*šms.w* *r-dr=f* *jr* js pry ḥt nb m r₃ n ḥm=f, ḥpr Ø ḥr-*.wj*

“For he knew with all the Followers that whatever comes from his Majesty’s mouth, it happens immediately” (*Urk.* I, 39,12-14)

*rh* *tw* tr ḏd mrr.t ḥm(=j) ḥ.t nb.t

“by nature you are wise enough (lit. you know) to say what My Majesty wishes more than anything” (*Urk.* I, 179,15-180,1)
Some interesting examples: Lexical complementarity

• \(wh3 - gmj\)

```
[LOOK FOR, SEARCH]  [FIND]  [HAVE FOUND/KNOW]

?? gmj ??

\( jw = f \ hr \ wrš \ hr \ wh3 = f \)

(Two Brothers 13,6)

\( jw = f \ hr \ gm.t \ w^c jrr.t \)

(Two Brothers 13,8)
```

"he spent the day looking for it"

present I (\(hr +\) inf.) - progressive

"it was found intact by the controllers"

present I (stative) – resultative perfect

"and he found an eyeball"

sequential - perfective
Some interesting examples: Lexical complementarity

- \( hr - h3j \)

\[ jw=w \ hr.w \ hr \ rd.wj=k \ r \ n\dot{h}\dot{h} \ d.t \]
“they have fallen down under your feet for ever” (Joppe 3,12)

\[ jw=<j> \ (hr) \ h3j.t \]
“and I fell” (pBM 10052, 6,11)

\[ jw=f \ hr \ h3j.t \ mwt \ m \ t3 \ wnw.t \ šrj.t \ (Two \ Brothers, \ 12,7) \]
“and he fell dead immediately (lit. in the short hour)”

sequential - perfective
Some interesting examples: Lexical complementarity
The pre- and post-phases are chronologically conditioned

- \( h\partial \rightarrow h\text{a}j \)

\[
t\text{h}3\text{bw}.t\ n\ pr-\text{c}.w.s.\ p\text{a}j.k\ nb\ h\text{a}j.\ r-k
\]
"the shadow of Pharaoh, your lord, has fallen onto you" (Wenamun, 2,46)

**present I (stative) – resultative perfect**

\[
jw\ t3\ h\text{b}w.t\ n\ t\text{a}j.f\ srp.t\ (h\partial)\ h\text{a}j.t\ r=j
\]
"the shadow of his umbrella fell upon me" (Wenamun, 2,45)

sequential - perfective

In Coptic, \( 2\epsilon \) (\(< h\text{a}j \)) “to fall, to be on the ground”
Some interesting examples: Lexical complementarity
The pre- and post-phases are chronologically conditioned

• *hr* - *h3j*

<table>
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<th></th>
<th><em>h3j</em></th>
<th><em>hr</em></th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Earlier Eg.</td>
<td>to descend, go down</td>
<td>to fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEng</td>
<td>to fall</td>
<td>to lie on the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coptic</td>
<td>to fall, lie on the ground</td>
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