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

	imperfective	perfective
present	я читаю	я прочитываю
futur	я буду читать	я прочитаю
past	я читал(а)	я прочитал(а)
infinitive	читать	прочитать
imperative	читай	прочитай
participle	читающий	прочитавший

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 ὕδωρ (acc.) vs.   πίνειν ὕδατος (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

impf.	perf.

смотреть "see, look"   посмотреть "(have a) look"
читать "read"   прочитать "read"
  подсчитать "calculate"

подсчитывать "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")
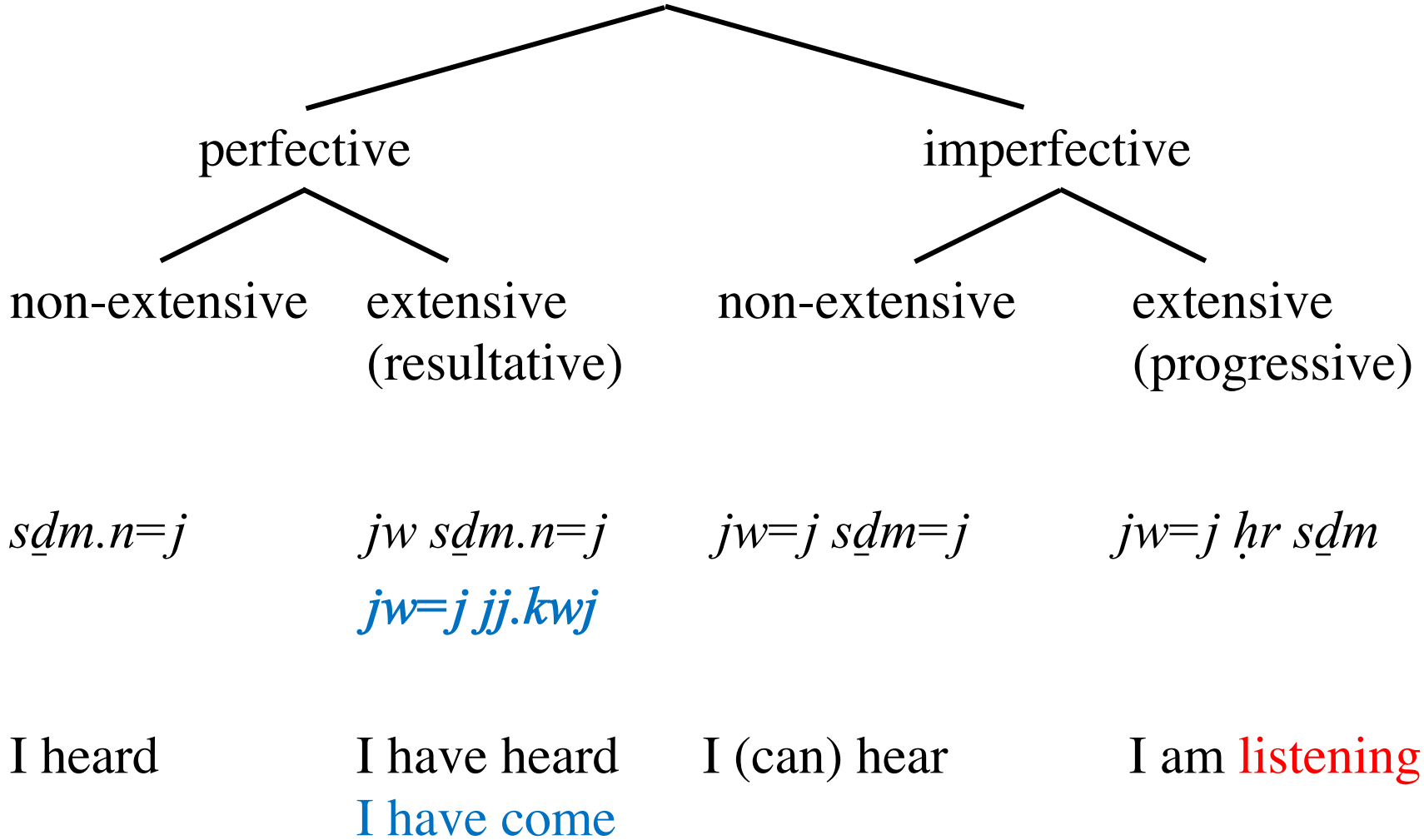
Ancient Egyptian: a quick overview

- 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

-3000		-2500		-2000	

proto-dynastic	Old Kingdom	1st Interm. Period	Middle Kingdom	2nd Interm. Period

Old Egyptian	Middle Egyptian

Classical Egyptian

-1500	-1000	-500	-1/+1	+500

New Kingdom	3rd Interm. Period	Late Period	Greek & Roman Times	Byzantine Period

Late Egyptian	D e m o t I c	C o p t I c

Traditional Egyptian (Egyptien de tradition)

The aspectual system of Middle Egyptian

```
                              _____
                             /                           \
                      perfective                      imperfective
                     /          \                    /            \
            non-extensive    extensive      non-extensive      extensive
                             (resultative)                    (progressive)
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sḏm.n=j	*jw sḏm.n=j*	*jw=j sḏm=j*	*jw=j ḥr sḏm*
	jw=j jj.kwj		
I heard	I have heard	I (can) hear	I am listening
	I have come		

jr ḫ3=k z ḥr mn r(3)-jb=f   imperfective – progressive
     jw=f mn=f g3b=f   imperfective – non-progressive

"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: *ꜥḥꜥ* "to stand up", *ḥmsj* "to sit down" and *sḏr* "to lay down", fully developed in Late Egyptian (for progressive, inchoative, and resultative), and *ḫpr* "to come into existence" (for inchoative);
  - aspectual auxiliary verbs: *šꜣꜥ* "start", *ḳn* "finish, end";
  - adverbs: *m-mnt* "everyday", *m-dwn* "continuously";
  - situation adverbs, like *ꜥꜣ* 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:
    - *rmṯ nb* "everyone" -> generic statement (imperfective)
  - the actionality (Aktionsart) of the verbal lexeme

Classes of actionality and aspect

Major criteria

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

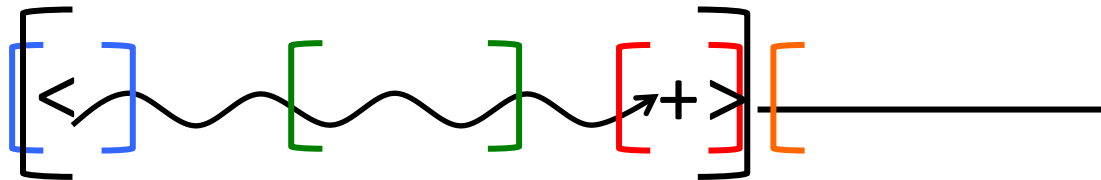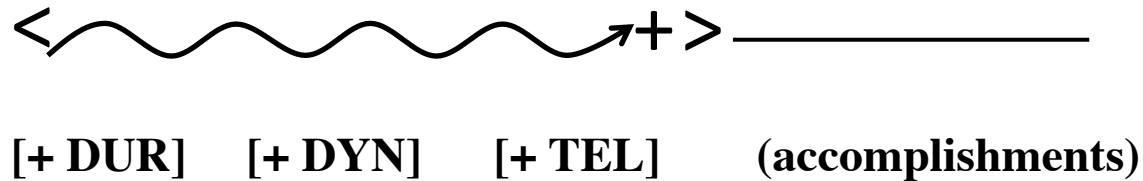*Secondary criteria*

[± BOUND]   [± CONTROL]

Also worth noting

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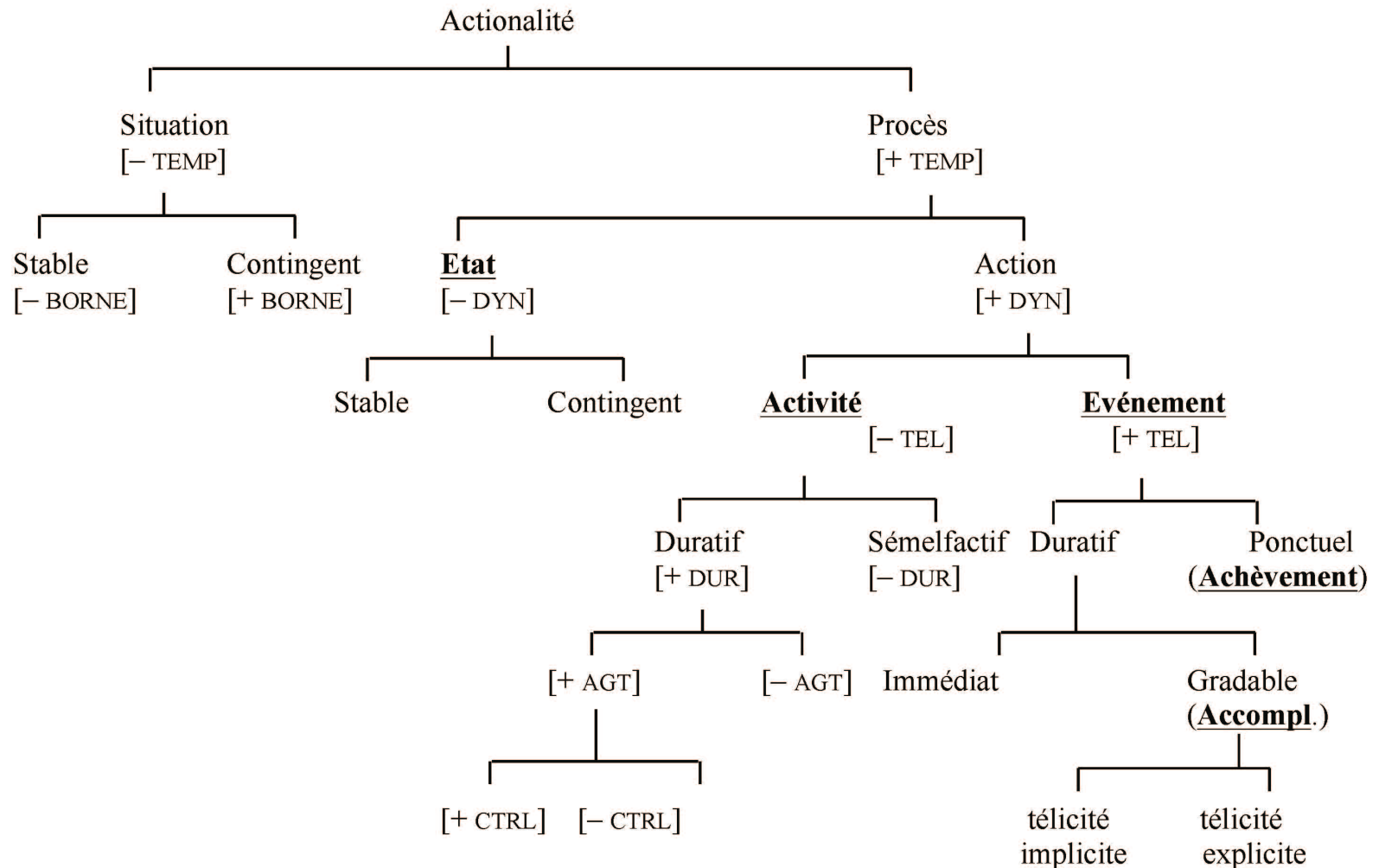
Taxonomy of verbal actionality in ancient Egyptian (Winand 2006)

Classes of actionality and aspect

Aspect as a phasal selection

[+ 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 wrš=n ḥr fꜣ(j).t jt ḥnꜥ bd.t ḥḏ.t

Are we going to spend the day carrying barley and white spelt?
(Paheri, pl. III, 4[th] reg., lines 3-4)

fꜣj "carry" [+ DUR] [+ DYN] [− TEL]
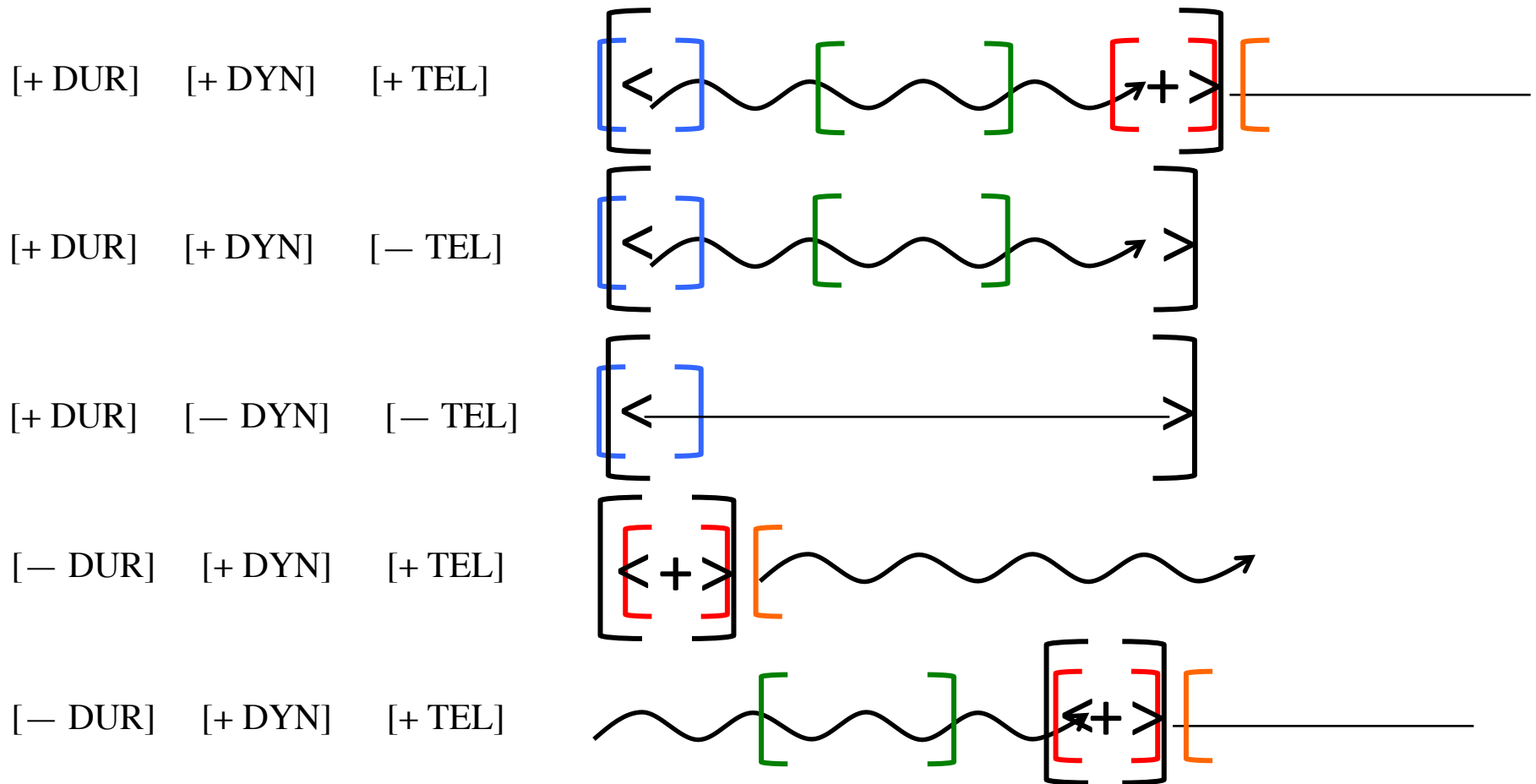
in progressive > no change in meaning

- -

wrš=j jm ḥr jꜣš n nty m šꜣ

I spend the day calling the one who is in the lake (*Fishing pleasures*, B III, 5)

jꜣš "shout a cry" [− DUR] [+ DYN] [− TEL]

in progressive > keep shouting, calling

Classes of actionality and aspect

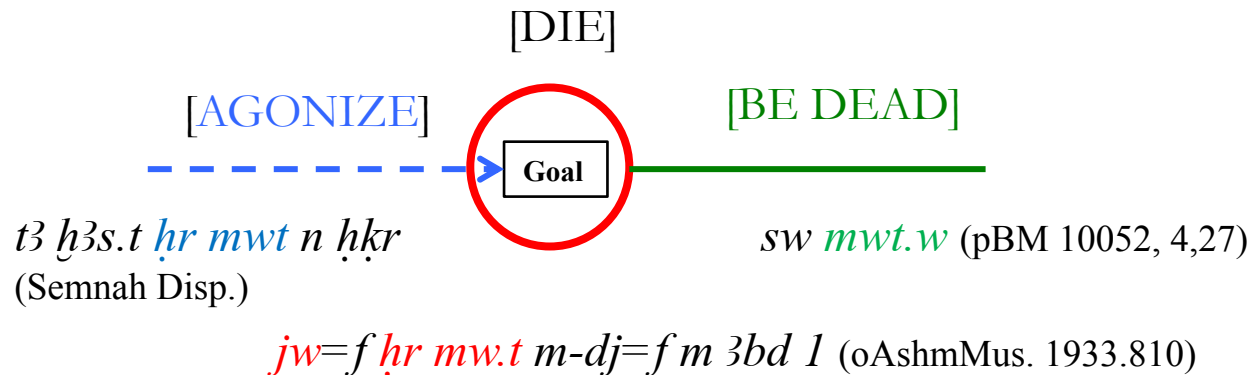Aspect selections are conditioned by actionality classes

[+ DUR]   [+ DYN]   [+ TEL]

[+ DUR]   [+ DYN]   [− TEL]

[+ DUR]   [− DYN]   [− TEL]

[− DUR]   [+ DYN]   [+ TEL]

[− DUR]   [+ DYN]   [+ TEL]

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

mwt "die" [— DUR] [— DYN] [+ TEL]

Pre-phase [+ DUR] [≃ DYN] [– CTRL]　　　　　Post-phase [+ DUR] [– DYN]

[DIE]

[AGONIZE]　　　　　　　　　　　　　[BE DEAD]

Goal

t3 ḫ3s.t ḥr mwt n ḥḳr　　　　　*sw mwt.w* (pBM 10052, 4,27)
(Semnah Disp.)

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

"the gebel is dying of hunger"　　　　　　　　"he is dead"
present I (*ḥr* + inf.) - progressive　　　　present I (stative) – resultative perfect

"and it (the donkey) died in his possession on the 1st month"

sequential - perfective

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

The post-phase can be **dynamic**
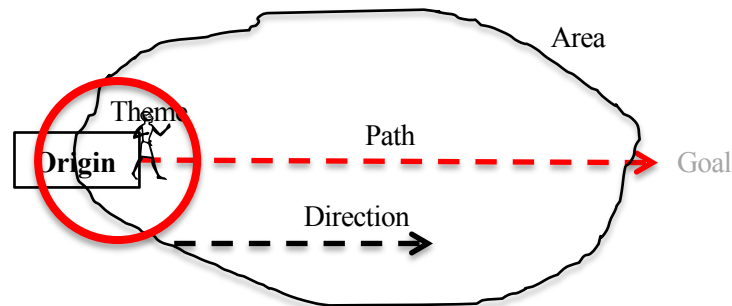
$[+$ TELIC$]$ $[-$ DURATIVE$]$ $[+$ DYNAMIC$]$

sw šm.w

he set to go
= he is on his way

sw wꜥr.w/wtḫ.w

he ran away
= he is on the run

sw rs.w

he awoke
= he is conscious

jst ḫftj nb wꜥr.w ḥr 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

   šm r X "to go to X" [– DUR] [+ DYN] [+ TEL]

   with a valency reduction (Dir > ∅) : "to walk"

   n(n) šm=j ∅ sẖd.kwj

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

   jnk rmṯ jwty jb=f, wrš (ḥr) šm m-sꜣ rꜣ=j mj jḥ m-sꜣ 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 "to eat X" [+ DUR] [+ DYN] [+ TEL]

with DirObj introduced by preposition ***m*** "in" > partitive

st ḥr wnm tꜣj=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 LEg, there is no longer a grammatical distinction between progressive and non-progressive (except for *ꜥḥꜥ*, *ḥmsj*, and *sḏr*)

jrj X "to do X" [+ DUR] [+ DYN] [+ TEL]

with DirObj introduced by preposition *m* "in" > progressive

*sw (ḥr) jr **m** pꜣj.f sḥn*

"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:

Earlier Eg.	DirObj			
	Perfective		Imperfective	
Late Egyptian	DirObj	*r* + NP	DirObj	*r* + NP
	OK	rare	rare	OK

Some interesting examples:
rḫ "to learn, to know"

mk grt *rḫ.n=j* *ḳd n ḥm.t jt=j*

"for I got to know the character of my father's wife" (pBM 10549, r° 8-9)

*sk* *sw rḫ*(*.w*) *ḥnꜥ šms.w r-ḏr=f jr js pry ḫt nb m rꜣ n ḥm=f, ḫpr ∅ ḥr-ꜥ.wj*

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

rḫ ṯw *tr ḏd mrr.t ḥm*(=*j*) *r ḫ.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)

fnrs

Some interesting examples: Lexical complementarity

- *wḫꜣ – gmj*

[FIND]

[LOOK FOR, SEARCH]   Goal   [HAVE FOUND/KNOW]

?? gmj ??
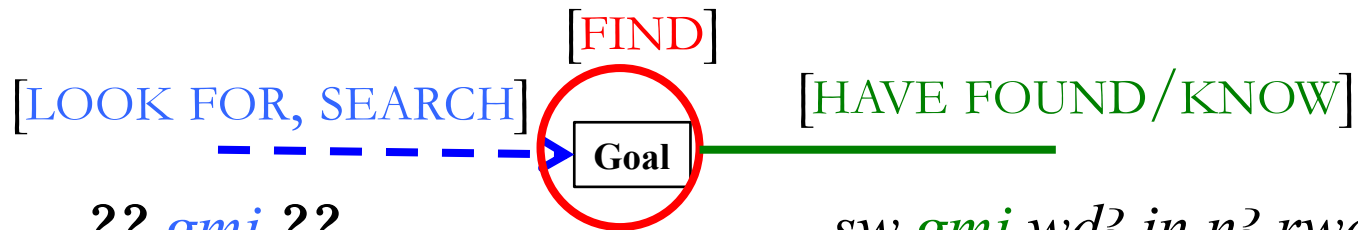
jw=f ḥr wrš ḥr wḫꜣ=f
(*Two Brothers* 13,6)

sw gmj wḏꜣ jn nꜣ rwḏ.w
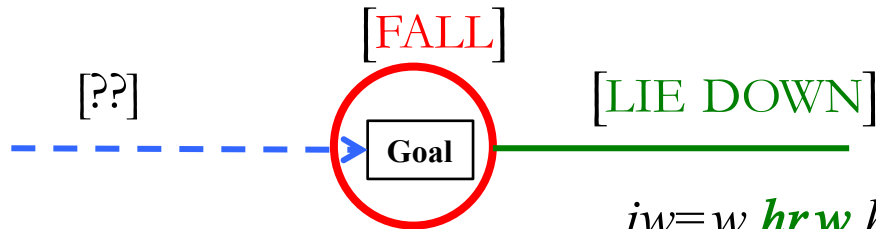(pAbbott, r° 2,7)

jw=f ḥr gm.t wꜥ jrr.t
(*Two Brothers*13,8)

"he spent the day looking for it"
present I (ḥr + inf.) - progressive

"it was found intact by the controllors"
present I (stative) – resultative perfect

"and he found an eyeball"
sequential - perfective

Some interesting examples: Lexical complementarity

- *ẖr - hꜣj*

[FALL]

[??]   [LIE DOWN]

Goal

jw=w ẖr.w ẖr rd.wj=k r nḥḥ ḏ.t
"they have fallen down under
your feet for ever" (*Joppe* 3,12)

present I (stative) – resultative perfect

jw=<j> (ḥr) hꜣj.t
"and I fell" (pBM 10052, 6,11)

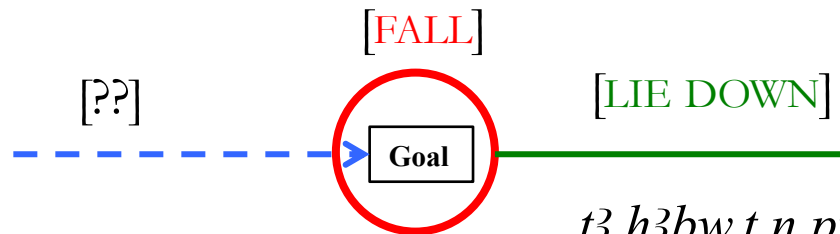*jw=f ḥr hꜣj.t mwt m tꜣ wnw.t šrj.t* (*Two Brothers*, 12,7)
"and he fell dead immediately (lit. in the short hour)"

sequential - perfective

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

- *ḫr - hꜣj*

[FALL]

[??]   [LIE DOWN]

Goal

*tꜣ ḫꜣbw.t n pr-ꜤꜢ Ꜥ.w.s. pꜣj.k nb **hꜣ** r=k*
"the shadow of Pharaoh, your lord, has fallen onto you" (*Wenamun*, 2,46)

present I (stative) – resultative perfect

*jw tꜣ ḫꜣbw.t n tꜣj.f srp.t (ḫr) **hꜣj.t** r=j*
"the shadow of his umbrella fell upon me" (*Wenamun*, 2,45)

sequential - perfective

In Coptic, ϩⲉ (< *hꜣj*) "to fall, to be on the ground"

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

- *ẖr - hꜣj*

	hꜣj	*ẖr*
Earlier Eg.	to descend, go down	to fall
LEg	to fall	to lie on the ground
Coptic	to fall, lie on the ground	———