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Structural Analysis of the Egyptian Independent Personal Pronoun

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Egyptian has three paradigms of the personal pronoun. They are here represented in their most ancient forms attested.

A.suffix pronoun			B.dependent pronoun		C.independent pronoun		
					C.2	C.1	C.3
Sg. 1 c.	<i>j</i>	<i>wj</i>	-	<i>jn.k</i> ¹	-		
2 m.	<i>k</i>	<i>kw, tw</i> ²	<i>tw.t</i>	-	<i>jnt.k</i>		
f.	<i>t</i>	<i>tm, tn</i> ²	<i>tm.t</i>	-	<i>jnt.t</i>		
3.m.	<i>f</i>	<i>sw</i>	<i>sw.t</i>	-	<i>jnt.f</i>		
f.	<i>s</i>	<i>sj</i>	<i>st.t</i>	-	<i>jnt.s</i>		
n. ³	-	<i>st</i>	-	-	-		
Pl. 1 c.	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	-	<i>*jn.n</i>	-		
2 c.	<i>tn</i>	<i>tn</i>	?	-	<i>jnt.tn</i>		
3 c.	<i>sn</i>	<i>sn</i>	?	-	<i>jnt.sn</i>		
Du. 1 c.	<i>nj</i>	<i>*nj</i>	-	?	-		
2 c.	<i>tnj</i>	<i>tnj</i>	?	-	<i>*jnt.tnj</i>		
3 c.	<i>snj</i>	<i>snj</i>	?	-	<i>jnt.snj</i>		

The paradigm of the independent pronoun (C) is not of uniform structure. For the 1st person, sg. and pl., the C.1 forms are used, for the 2nd/3rd persons, sg. and pl., a base *jnt* is used, to which the respective suffix pronouns are attached (C.3 = *jnt* + A).⁴ In the Pyramid Texts, a 3rd millenium corpus of rather archaic appearance, different

forms are used for the 2nd/3rd persons sg., viz. paradigm C.2.

Many of the forms of paradigms A and B are attested in vocalized compounds, from 2nd millenium cuneiform transcriptions through Coptic, but due to their suffixal or enclitic character, their vowels cannot be discerned. Neither is the vocalization of any of the forms of the archaic paradigm C.2 attested. Most forms of paradigms C.1 and C.3 can, however, be vocalized with certainty as they are preserved in Coptic: *janák*, *j.n.ták*,⁵ *j.n.tát*, *j.n.táf*; *j.nán*, *j.n.tát.n*. Others can be reconstructed by analogy, e.g. *j.n.tat.n.j*. Furthermore, the blank vowels can be given a hypothetic quality, partly based on comparativistic arguments. Thus, the base *jnt-* of C.3 is probably *jant-*, see below. The 2- and 3-consonantal suffixes of the plural and dual could very well be *-tun*, *-sun*, *-túnaj*, *-súnaj*, cf. the forms in Semitic.

Of the forms of paradigms A and B, cognates are apparent in other Afroasiatic branches. The same is true of *jn.k* (paradigm C.1), less obviously though of its plural counterpart *jn.n*. A structural analysis within Egyptian is advisable, as is for paradigms C.2 and C.3. C.2 is obviously formed of B by adding an ending *-t* (C.2 = B + *t*). C.3 is composed by adding the suffix pronouns (paradigm A) to a base *jant-*. Suggestions to relate this latter to the 2nd person independent pronouns of Semitic (*anta*, etc.; Gardiner 1957 § 64) cannot account for the suffix pronouns being attached to them and should be deferred as long as an Egyptian derivation is feasible. Already in 1926, B. Gunn discerned a noun *nt*, seeming "to mean primarily something very abstract like 'being', or better, the German *Wesen*. Thus with suffixes *nt.k*, *nt.f*, etc. (independent

pronouns), *dein Wesen, sein Wesen*, i.e., 'thou', 'he'" (Gunn 1926: 129). He thought it to be "the same word as the feminine 'indirect genitive exponent'" (ibid.), *nt* (see also Edel 1955/64 § 345). Thus, *jnt* > *nt* can be explained as the substantivized fem. sg. form of the nisba adjective **jn⁶j* > *nj*, derived from the "dative" preposition **jn* > *n*: *nj*, fem. *nt*,⁷ adjective, 'being in relation to (someone/something)' (cf. Satzinger 1986); hence *nwt nt nḥḥ* 'the city (fem.) which is in relation to eternity', 'the city of eternity' ("indirect genitive", Gardiner 1957 § 86); substantival use: *nj Ptḥ* 'he who is in relation to Ptah', 'he of Ptah' (personal name); predicative use: *nj sw Ptḥ* 'he (sw) belongs to Ptah'; neuter meaning of fem. form: *nt-ḥsb* 'what is in relation to reckoning (ḥsb)', 'accountancy' (*Wörterbuch* II: 197); *nt pw* ... 'it is a fact, ...', 'actually, ...' (*Wörterbuch* II: 350). From the latter, a further nisba derivation yields the "relative (clause) adjective", *ntj*, fem. *ntt*, the basic meaning of which is 'existing', 'who exists' (Satzinger 1984: 128). Thus, the meaning of the derivative noun *nt* can encompass notions like 'relation', 'essence', 'matter', 'fact', even 'existence'.

The vowels of the preposition *n* and its nisba derivation can be reconstructed with sufficient plausibility (Fecht 1960 § 32). The preposition is *janī-* > *nī-*, the adjective is *janīj* > *nij*, fem. *janīt* > *nīt*.

Whereas similar considerations have several times been made, it was not observed that a severe phonetic crux mars such a theory. In reproducing the pronominal paradigm C.3, we reach a result that does not at all conform to the phonetic facts actually attested. Proto-Egn. *janit* + *ka* would,

in consistency with well-established laws, yield Egn. (or Proto-Coptic) **janittak*. The Coptic forms, however, presuppose *jan(i)ták*:

janit + *ka* > **janít.ak* ≠ *jan(i)tá.k* > *ntok*
janit + *ki* > **janít.it* ≠ *jan(i)tá.t* > *nto*
janit + *kum* > **janít.tun* ≠ *jan(i)tá.tun* > *ntōtn*

From the above, it is obvious that a third element must be involved, viz. a stress-bearing vowel, *á*, connecting the base *janit*- and the pronominal suffixes:

janit.a.ka > *jan(i)t.á.k* > *ntok*
janit.a.ki > *jan(i)t.á.t* > *nto*
janit.a.kum > *jan(i)t.á.tun* > *ntōtn*

Of course it may be argued that the assumption of a base *janit*- is a mere hypothesis for which cogent proof cannot be given. And in fact, other explanations have been offered. Thus, Westendorf (1953: 82) has suggested that *nt.k* is formed from an introductory particle *jn* plus a noun *tj/tw* which he assumes to mean *'body', *'person', or the like. But whatever vocalization is assumed for this noun, there is no chance to arrive at a simple short stress-bearing vowel *a* in the pre-suffix position. Hence, the nature of the base *jnt*- is not crucial to the problem. It is, in fact, a question of the stressed vowel intervening between the base and the ending.

Having thus isolated an element *á* which is attached to the base of the independent pronoun of type C.3, we may try to determine its function and meaning. This can be done by analysing the functions of this very pronoun. The three pronominal paradigms of Egyptian are not distinguished for their syntactic functions. Thus, forms of each and every paradigm may be employed as subjects, though each in clear-

ly defined environments only (A: *jw sdm.n.j* 'I heard', *jw.j hn^c.k* 'I am with you'; B: *nfr wj* 'I am good', *mk wj hn^c.k* 'behold, I am with you'; C: *jnk sn.k* 'I am your brother'). What, then, is the criterion of the independent pronoun? Traditionally, it is also called "subject pronoun". However, its subject function is not at all representative. We have, rather, to proceed from the fact that it is the independent pronoun alone that can occupy initial position (apart from its use in backward extraposition). In initial position, the independent pronoun may be unstressed (Coptic *ang-* instead of *anók*). This is the case when it functions as the subject of a nominal predicate. Here, a crucial observation can be made: it is restricted to the 1st and 2nd persons, whereas a different pattern appears for a 3rd person pronominal subject:

jnk sn.k 'I am your brother' (Coptic *ang pek-són*)

twt/ntk sn.j 'you (masc.) are my brother'

(but: *sn.k pw* 'he is your brother')

There is, on the other hand, no such restriction when the independent pronoun bears full stress, which means it is predicative:

jnk pw (Coptic *anók pe*) 'it is I'

swt/ntf pw 'it is he'; *swt/ntf wr* 'he is the Great One'

And no other pronoun can be employed as a pronominal predicate. These facts alone seem to advocate for regarding the predicate rôle as primary, and the subject rôle as secondary. But there is another point. There are conditions under which the independent pronoun is in paradigmatic relationship, not with the simple substantive, but rather with a morpheme *jn*, extended by a substantive. One of these cases is the construction with rhematic noun, usually called the "participial statement" (Gardiner 1957 §§ 227.3; 373). The other is the indirect agent expression with verbs:

1) agent rhematized participial syntagma

<i>jnk</i>	c'est moi	
<i>swt/ntf</i>	c'est lui	<i>jr sw</i> qui l'a fait
<i>jn sn.k</i>	c'est ton frère	

2) infinitive indirect agent expression

	<i>jnk</i>	on my part
<i>prt</i> going forth	<i>swt/ntf</i>	on his part
	<i>jn sn.k</i>	on the part of your brother

Whereas the substantive is here in need of a particular morpheme *jn*, signalling either a rhematic function or backward extraposition, the independent pronoun is not: its nature is obviously in perfect concord with these functions. (It has been assumed by several scholars [Sethe 1891; Lefebvre § 91] that it is this morpheme *jn* that forms the base of the *jnt.k* pronouns. Let us first state that the older forms of paradigm C.2 do not contain an element *jn*... Furthermore, the independent pronoun has other functions where it is in paradigmatic relationship with the bare substantive [see above]. At any rate, the element *t* is not accounted for by this theory. Nevertheless, this morpheme *jn* and the base *jnt-* may very well be closely related. However, they do not match in structure.)

If, then, the independent pronoun is basically a predicate pronoun (or something very similar to such), its characteristic morpheme *á* may be safely assumed to be the element that yields this very effect: a simple **janit.ka*, 'your existence' or the like, could be imagined in the rôle of a subject, 'you', French *tu*. A *janit.á.ka*, however, is predicative: '... (is) your existence', and eventually '... (is) you', French *c'est toi* ...

Historical Egyptian had quite certainly no cases marked by vocalic endings, as are found in some Semitic languages (pace Callender 1975). The rigid word order of Egyptian is strong evidence against such an assumption. Moreover, the laws of the "Proto-Coptic" syllable structure - which provide in word-final position closed syllables only - preclude vocalic endings. Analysis of paradigm C.3 of the independent pronoun has, however, revealed the remnant of a vocalic ending attached to a substantive. This may be regarded as testimony for some kind of Pre-Egyptian vocalic case marking. Its function does not point towards a system with a Nominative vs. Accusative opposition (as in Akkadian, Arabic, Geez), but rather an opposition of Subject Case vs. Absolute Case. H.-J. Sasse (1984) has revealed such a system in Cushitic, he found also traces of it in Berber, and he could show that several Absolute Case characteristics are disguised in the Accusative of the Semitic idioms mentioned. The most conspicuous feature of the latter system is that the nominal predicate is not of the same form as the subject (viz., the Nominative), but rather a form that marks, inter alii, the direct object, the vocative, etc. (viz., the Absolute Case). The morphological feature of the Absolute Case is an ending *-a*. This may very well be identical with the ending *-a* of the noun *janit* which has above been identified in the personal pronoun of the *janták* type.⁸

In the latter, the presence of a stress-bearing vowel *a* is a fact. The same is true of the forms of paradigm C.1: *jan.á.k*, *jan.á.n*. The *jan-* base may be regarded as yet another predicate marker, cf. the use of *jn* in the constructions mentioned above. Of paradigm C.2, no vocalized forms are preserved. Comparison with Semitic

pronoun forms may, however, allow a hypothetical reconstruction. Several Semitic languages have forms of the subject pronoun augmented by *-āti/u* (thus vocalized in Akkadian; Moscati et alii 1969: 103; for a comparison with the Egyptian forms see Diakonoff 1965: 73). They are employed instead of the bare subject pronoun (Geez), or otherwise for the direct object (Akkadian, Ugaritic) or after prepositions (Ugaritic, South Arabian, Akkadian), etc. In analogy to these forms, the pronouns of the Egyptian C.2 paradigm may tentatively be reconstructed as follows: *ku.a.ti*, *kim.a.ti*, *suw.a.ti*, *sit.a.ti* (replacing **sij.a.ti?*) > *tuwát* *tímát*, *suwát*, *sitát*, respectively. Apart from the final element *ti* (which is definitely not a feminine ending, pace Diakonoff), a stress-bearing vowel *a* can once more be discerned.

The *janták* type pronoun (C.3) is obviously of rather recent origin (late "Proto-Egyptian"). Its base is a substantive that is still extant in historical Egyptian, its marker for person/gender/number is the usual suffix pronoun. Its only pre-historic feature is the ending *a* of the basic substantive *janit*. The formation of the two other types, however, cannot be explained along the lines of historical Egyptian. The *janák* type (C.1) is formed of a base that may be identical with a "particle" to which adverbial nature or status is often ascribed. The pronoun's marker for person/number is similar, though not equal, to the conjugation endings of the stative (old perfective). Judging from the Akkadian evidence, it is an old subject pronoun. The formation of the *tuwát* type pronoun (C.2), viz. addition of an ending *-ati* to a personal pronoun, is not otherwise operative in Egyptian. Therefore it cannot be claimed that the stress-bearing *a* of the *janák* and *tuwát* types is structurally identical with the stressed *a*

of the *jantāk* type, hence probably a case ending. It may, however, be materially identical with it, as a remnant of a more ancient stage of the language when the morpheme was operative in a freer way.

Eventually, the Egyptian personal pronoun shall be viewed before the Afroasiatic background. The Egyptian forms preserve much archaic substance, but display interesting innovations also. For this reason they should be granted a more prominent place in comparative studies. Up till now, it has not been possible to find sufficient correlations between forms and functions of the Afroasiatic pronominal paradigms. Whenever the relevant forms are arranged in accordance with the system of one particular branch or language, contradictory evidence is found in others. Therefore one should refrain from such a procedure and rather arrange the forms according to their morphological structure.

Basic	Subject Pronoun		Absolute Pronoun	
(S, Ch)	(E)	(S, C)	(S, E, B)	(S)
I : nī	w _u j	anī, anā	an.ā.ku	ī.ā.ti
	(E, B, Ch)	(S, C)		(S, E)
ka	kū(a), kay	an.ta		kū.ā.ti
ki	kim(a)	an.ti		ki(m).ā.ti
	(S, C, E)			(S, E)
su	sū(a)			sū.ā.ti
sa	sī(a), sit(a)			si(t).ā.ti

(Abbreviations: B[erber], C[ushitic], Ch[adic], E[gyptian], S[emitic])

The forms that may be regarded as basic are those that are preserved as suffixes. There is another series, preserved in the Egyptian dependent pronouns, that is in clear

material correlation with the basic forms, though definitely distinct from them. We may tentatively call this the Subject Pronoun, as its function as subject in nominal sentences is a common denominator of its uses. It is the marked counterpart of the Basic Pronoun. Semitic and Cushitic, the easternmost branches, seem to have substituted for the Subject Pronoun of the 1st/2nd ps. an analytic formation the base of which is *an-*. It is obviously not of uniform structure. In the 2nd ps., the person/gender/number markers are equal to the conjugation endings of the Akkadian Stative, though the *ā* intervening between the stem and the ending of the latter (*pars.ā.ta*) is not included.

The third category of pronouns may originally have been confined to being used in the Absolute Case. All forms are derivative. The *ī.ā.ti* and *an.ā.ku* types are obviously rather early formations, as compared with Egyptian *jnt.k* and various Cushitic forms. *An.ā.ku* conforms to the Akkadian Stative conjugation, this time including the intervening vowel *ā* (*pars.ā.ku*). A later derivational pattern involves a noun and the suffix pronoun, viz. Egyptian *jantā-*, Bedauye *barū-/batū-*. Forms like Somali *ani.ga*, *adi.ga*, attaching a rhematizing morpheme to the Subject Pronoun, may be the latest type.

In contradistinction to Cushitic, Egyptian, and Berber, Semitic displays two (probably interdependent) syntactic features that have great bearing on this subject. The first one is its lacking such rhematizing/thematizing patterns as are so characteristic of the syntax of the other branches mentioned. The second is its substituting a system of Nominative vs. Accusative Case for one of Subject vs. Absolute Case (though retaining some relics of the latter). This may explain why the forms of the Absolute Pronoun either

intruded into the paradigm of the Subject Pronoun (Akkadian *anāku*, Hebrew *anōkī*; Geez *we'ētū*) or were restricted to direct object function, etc. (Akkadian *jāti* paradigm). And just as the Nominative has become the normal form of the nominal predicate (replacing the Absolute Case), the Subject Pronoun can also be used for the pronominal predicate in Semitic.

Egyptian, on the other hand, has undergone great change in verbal morphology. In the typical Egyptian "suffix conjugation", the subject is expressed by the Basic Pronoun, while the Subject Pronoun is used for the direct object. It may be on account of this reinterpretation that the Subject Pronoun is avoided in the nominal sentence, except with adjectival predicate. Instead, the subject of the nominal sentence is expressed in the 1st/2nd ps. by the Absolute Pronoun (which has become proclitic in this status), and in the 3rd ps. by a demonstrative pronoun (*pw/tw/nw*).

Finally, the obvious asymmetry of the system has to be accounted for. In theory, subject (theme, topic) and predicate (rheme, comment) are in polar correlation. Practically, transitional positions are often taken by nouns (resulting from interaction of different levels). The informational load of a theme may be light, nearly nil, or heavy. The heavier it is, the closer comes the theme to a "commenting" (rhematic) status. Among the personal pronouns, a hierarchy of average informational load is discernible. The 3rd ps. pronoun - mostly of anaphoric semantic function - bears the least weight, whereas the 1st ps. pronoun transports of necessity a certain minimum amount of "new" information, by referring to the person of the speaker. This can explain several of the features connected with

the Absolute Pronoun. Not only in Semitic, but also in Berber the 1st ps. Absolute Pronoun anāku has entered the Subject Pronoun paradigm. In Egyptian, the Absolute Pronoun of the 1st and 2nd ps. is used, not only for the nominal predicate, but also for the subject of the latter. The 3rd ps. pronoun is, however, only used if its informational load is truly rhematic. For the same reason, Semitic and Cushitic may have created a new Subject Pronoun (with the base an-) for the 1st and 2nd ps. only - innovations tend to carry more information than traditional elements do. For the 3rd ps. pronoun, however, this need was obviously not felt.

NOTES

- 1 Although general opinion holds that graphemic *j* renders [j], some prefer to return to an older concept of *j* in initial position rendering the glottal stop (Schenkel 1987: 29). Cf. the traditional transcription by *ǝ*.
- 2 The Pyramid Texts have both forms, whereas the respective second forms are the only ones found otherwise. - Note that *t* is *ǝ* < k.
- 3 The pronominal neuter gender category assumed plural meaning in Middle Egyptian, cf. also demonstrative *n-* vs. *p-/t-* (masc./fem.).
- 4 Actually, the base is spelled *jnt-* in archaic type inscriptions only; otherwise it is *nt-*.
- 5 The symbols "◌" and "◌-" are egyptological convention for rendering short and long vowels, respectively, of unknown quality.
- 6 For the assumption of older forms *jn*, *jnj*, etc., see Fecht (1960 § 32).
- 7 In systematic transcription, the fem. sg. nisba ending is rendered by *-jt*. This transcriptional form is attained by mechanically adding the nominal fem. ending *t* to the (masc. sg.) nisba ending *j*. Reconstruction of vocalized forms points, however, in many if not all cases, to a consonantal skeleton *-t* only. We have to assume that the nisba ending is here realized as a vowel (*i*) only. Cf. Osing (1976: 309).
- 8 Just in passing it may be mentioned that several Egyptian prepositions are candidates for further examples of the Absolute Case marker *a*, e.g. *jr.f* > *eróf*, *jm.f* > *mmóf*. Functional parallels between the Semitic subjunctive *yaqtula* and the Egyptian subjunctive *s.ǝmá.f*, such as their respective uses in the Clause of Purpose, point to yet another case of Absolute Case residue, although this matter is far from being clear of dispute.

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