

Helmut Satzinger:

On the verb forms connected with the negation *n*

The majority of the negative verbal utterances contain the short *n* negation, \overline{n} (originally *nj*), plus a form of the suffix pronoun conjugation, notably of Middle Egyptian

- *n sdm·f*,
- *n sdm·n·f*, and
- *n sdmt·f*.

Other negative verbal constructions include those with thethetic negation, Middle Egyptian \overline{nn} , which we are used to transcribe as *nn* (a more correct transcription would probably be *nj*); furthermore those with the negative auxiliary verbs *jmj* and *tm*, in which the main verb follows in the form of the negational complement; and the postpositive negation *w* of Old Egyptian. *tm* is used for negating any nominal and adjectival verb forms, like infinitive (*tm sdmw* “not to hear”), participles (if feminine singular, *tm·t sdmw* “who does / did not hear”), relative forms (if feminine singular, *tm·t·f sdmw*, e.g. “whom (fem.) he does not hear”; *tm·t·n·f sdmw* “whom (fem.) he did not hear”), and the ‘that’ forms (*tm·f sdmw* “that he does not hear”; *tm·n·f sdmw*, “that he did not hear”); *jmj·f sdmw* “(in order) that he may not hear” is the negative subjunctive (but in Old Egyptian also *jmj sdm·f*), whereas the negative imperative is *m* (< *jmj*) *sdmw* “do not hear!” (Satzinger 1968).

Egyptian clauses are of any the following four syntactic statuses.

- 1 Initial main sentences
- 2 Sequential Sentences and (identical in form) clauses of circumstance; they share features with no. 1
- 3 Nominal part clauses: *that* clauses
- 4 Adjectival part clauses: relative clauses (resembling *that* clauses, though characterized by gender and number concord)

Some clause constructions can be found in Statuses 1 and 2 only:

- Sentences with a noun or pronoun as predicate (Nominal Sentences)
- Sentences with an adjective as predicate (Adjectival Sentences)
- Thetic clauses, with initial elements *m·k* / *m·t* / *m·tn*, “behold, there is ...!”; negative, *nn* “there is no ...”; rarer: *js̄t* “now, there is ...”; *jw* “there is ...” (Satzinger 2009)
- Verbal utterances with initial *jw*, or *m·k* / *m·t* / *m·tn*
- Negative clauses with *n*

Clause constructions that are found in Status 3 include phrases with one of the forms *sdm·f* (including *sdmw·f*), *sdm·n·f*, and *sdmt·f* as nucleus. To these constructions can be added clauses introduced by invariable *ntt* “that” (in the Old Kingdom also *wnt*).

Clause constructions that are found in Status 4 include phrases with a verbal nucleus in the form of one of the participles, or of the relative forms. To these constructions can be added clauses introduced by the the so-called relative adjective *ntj*, feminine *nt·t*, etc.

The finite verb forms can be categorized according to their ability to feature in one or several of the Statuses. The Stative (old perfective) appears in Middle Egyptian in Status 2. Those forms of the suffix pronoun conjugation that appear in Status 1 and/or 2 are traditionally called “rhematic.” Those that appear in Status 3 are called substantival, or nominal, also “emphatic,” though this latter

term is inappropriate, as the adverb-emphasizing construction is but one of their various ways of employment. Those that appear in Status 4 are called relative forms.

The constructions of *n* preceding a verb form are found in Statuses 1 and 2, hence they are “rhematic.” Nevertheless, the form *sdm·n·f* after *n* shows characteristics of the nominal form *sdm·n·f*, the verb form of Status 3: whereas the rhematic form is not found of the intransitive verbs of motion, the form after *n* is, like the nominal form. The passive counterpart of the rhematic *sdm·n·f* are in Middle Egyptian the passive *sdm(f)* and the stative, whereas the nominal *sdm·n·f*, as also the form after *n*, show *sdm·n·tw·f*.

Polotsky (1976:46) saw that *n sdm·n·f* contained the nominal form, and of course expected the same of the *sdm·f* of *n sdm·f*. However, the forms of the irregular verbs seemed to point to *sdm·f* after *n* being the circumstantial *sdm·f* (the rhematic form of the aorist), according to the grammatical knowledge of that period. But forms like *dj·f* and *m33·f* may equally well be the nominal perfective *sdm·f*. It would seem, then, that the forms that follow *n* are nominal forms, although the *n* constructions are not found in Status 3, but rather in Status 1 and 2.

It may here be noted that there is no direct correlation in respect to TAM between the affirmative forms *sdm·f* and the negative construction *n sdm·f*, nor between *sdm·n·f* and the negative construction *n sdm·n·f*. *n sdm·f* refers in most instances to past or perfect, whereas the affirmative *sdm·f* form only rarely does so, at least in Middle Egyptian. *n sdm·n·f* is in Middle Egyptian nearly always a negative aorist, “he cannot hear” (or “(him) not being able to hear”), whereas the affirmative *sdm·n·f* has originally perfect, later past reference. GUNN observed
... that it is impossible to generalize—for Mid. Egn., at all events—as to the nature of *ś·n·f* and *ś·f* from affirmative and negated examples indiscriminately, since quite different rules apply to the two categories, a fact through which ERMAN, SETHE and others have been led astray in the past. (GUNN 1924: 198-99.)

The constructions *n* plus *sdm(·n)·f* are found in Status 1 (main sentence) and 2 (sequential clause, clause of circumstance). The forms employed, however, are nominal (otherwise employed in Status 3). Traditional opinion holds that the negation *n* is a mere particle, in the sense that it is an element that does not have any syntactic function, nor even any influence on the construction. The nature of the phrase would then depend on the nature of the verb form. But this is obviously not the case. As the negative constructions with *n* plus verb form are either main sentences, or sequential, or clauses of circumstance, this can not be due to the nature of the respective verb forms, which are nominal, but rather to the nature of *n*.

The negation which we spell *nn* isthetic, meaning “... does not exist.” The construction *nn sdm·f* originally consists of the negation, and a nominal/substantival verb form (a subjunctive), as the complement (compare the structure of *nn sdm·f* with that of *nn sw* “he does not exist”). As for *nn sdm·f*, the negative future of Middle Egyptian, this had originally a modal character (Allen 2000:287/§ 21.5). The biographic inscriptions of the First Intermediate Period use *nn sdm·f* with volitive (telic) meaning only (*nn dj·f* “he is not to give”), in accordance with the nature of the verb form involved: “it does not exist that he shall give”; otherwise they have recourse to *n* plus prospective *sdm·f* (i.e., *n rdjj·f* “he will not give”) (Díaz Hernández, 2013:46ff.). The grammaticalization of *nn sdm·f* is obviously quite recent: in the First Intermediate Period it can perhaps still be seen as a combination ofthetic *nn* with subjunctive *sdm·f* in free use.

The short negation  which we are used to spell *n* is probably a mere prosodic variant of  “*nn*,” at least historically (Edel 1955+1964 § 1076); both negations may be properly reading *nj*

(Westendorf 1962: 249–51 § 342). The combinations of *n* with verb forms are obviously grammaticalizations that are more ancient than the *nn sdm.f* just mentioned. Yet in origin they must have been of the same structure, that is, “it does not exist that he (has) heard / that he will hear etc.”

With this in mind — *n* being originally athetic predicative, the following verb forms having subject function, hence being nominal/substantival (an abstract, or non-attributive, relative form) — we may try to identify these verb forms.

In most instances *n sdm.f* refers to the past, whether with present perfect meaning (cf. Gunn 1924:94), past tense meaning (Gunn 1924:96), or past perfect meaning (Gunn 1924:96). In the cases where *n sdm.f* has static present tense meaning, it is mainly found of verbs of quality, and Gunn plausibly suggested (Gunn 1924: 97) to see in them a special case of present perfect. A convincing example of another type of verb is that of *rh*, basic meaning: “to learn, to come to know”; *n rh.f* does, however, not mean “he did not learn” but rather, “he does not know” (static present; Allen 2000:266/§ 20.5): cf. *oīda*, *novi*, *ich weiß* — all basically perfect tense forms with the meaning of a static present. If the basic meaning of *n rh.f* is “it does not exist that he has learned,” the verb form involved is the perfective *sdm.f*; *nota bene*: the “that” variant, the nominal/substantival form, “that he heard.” Perfective *sdm.f* is rare in Middle Egyptian, the “that” form being perhaps even rarer than the rhematic variant, having been replaced by nominal/substantival *sdm.n.f* by Middle Egyptian times. It can be found, e.g., expanding prepositions like *m* when having (relative) past reference, or in absolute use where it is usually translated as a Clause of Time (like *t3 ḥd* “when the land had become light”). “To give” has the form with initial *r* both in these cases, as also after negation *n*; forms *m33* or *m3n* are typical forms of “to see.” Weak IIIae inf. verbs show the shortest forms, whereas IIae red. display the full stem. A discrepancy between affirmative and negative construction came only into existence when, towards the late Old Kingdom, *sdm.n.f* superimposed the perfective *sdm.f* as a past tense form, though only in affirmative use: in the negative construction *n sdm.f* the old form survived.

Things are different with *sdm.n.f* and *n sdm.n.f*. What we can say is that the affirmative form is originally a perfect. The negative construction, however, expresses an aorist, or general present. Both uses are of perfective aspect: can this suffice for an explanation?

In their origin, the constructions consisting of *n* + substantival conjugated verb form are negative thetic sentences, “it does not exist, that ...” They must have become grammaticalised before the Old Kingdom already. They are now non-analysable entities; they are Status 1 and 2 constructions, that is, they can function as independent main clauses, or as consecutive clauses, or clauses of circumstance.

Notes

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