

¹ The Celtic languages, however, are obviously different. They have, in unmarked utterances, the rheme in the first position: Irish-Gaelic *Cad é sin ? – Is leabhar é* "What (*cad*) is this ? – It is a book (*leabhar*)"; Cymric *Beth yw Tom ? – Bachgen yw Tom* "What is Tom ? – Tom is a boy (*bachgen*)"; Breton *Setu Mona. Merc'h ar mestr-skol eo. Ur verc'h vrvav eo Mona* « Voilà Mona. Elle est la fille (*merc'h* > *verc'h*) de l'instituteur. Mona est une belle (*brav* > *vrav*) fille » (from various textbooks).

njsw pw jī ‘(Only) he who is summoned is it who comes’: the coming is obvious, it is the theme; the question is: why didn’t you come before? The answer (the rheme): It is because you didn’t invite me.

(3) Stela Brussels E. 5300 (Speleers, *RecTrav* 39, 1921, 113-144; cf. Gardiner, *Grammar* § 130)



p3 pw Wsjr ‘Such is Osiris.’

(4) Urk. IV, 123, 12 (Paheri)



jt pw s'h n jrj n3f ‘The dignified diseased (*s'h*) is a father for the one who offers to him.’

There are, however, also not so few nominal sentences whose theme is in the final position, and this is true of both bimembral and trimembral sentences (the latter with marker *pw*).² These inverted nominal sentences are marked: they have a particular semantic nuance. In some of them the first noun is topicalised, or the second is focalised, or both. Compare enumerations like:

(5) Pyr. 1123b (cf. 341c)



snt3f Spdt, s3mw3f ntr dw3 ‘His sister, she is Sothis; his guide, she is the morning star.’

(6) Pyr. 1375a



mwt nt N. 3s.t, mn'3f Nbt-hwt ‘The mother of N. is Isis, his nurse is Nephthys’.

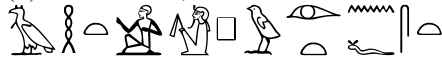
The inverted nominal sentences are often explicative, or glossing.

(7) Urk. IV 1091,6



sr pw sr sn3w n3f ‘The (true) noble is the noble who is feared.’

(8) Urk. IV 367,8



nh3j pw jrt n3f st ‘It was my wish to do it for ihm.’

(9) P. Westcar 7, 17–18



hr j3wt st mnj, st krs, st sm3-t3 ‘for old age is the time of death, the time of enwrapping, and the time of burial’ (after Lichtheim).

The situation is different in the sentence with pronominal subject. The order of elements is here not determined by markedness, but rather by the nature of the pronoun used. If it is *pw* (3rd person), which is enclitic, the order can only be theme — rheme (= *pw*). If, however, the subject is a pronoun of the 1st or 2nd person — for which the absolute pronoun is used — the pronoun is kind of proclitic (as we can see in Coptic: *anī nekson* ‘I’m your brother’), which means that it is in first position, the sequence being theme (= pronoun) — rheme. Hence the sequence of elements has here nothing to do with markedness. It depends solely on the grammatical person (1st or 2nd in one case, 3rd in the other).

For discussing the unimembral sentence of Late Egyptian, we have to proceed from the nominal sentence with a pronominal subject of the 3rd person, like Middle Egyptian *ntr pw* ‘he is god.’

Unimembral Nominal Sentences of Late Egyptian

The unimembral sentence resembles a Nominal Sentence with a pronominal subject of the third Person, with the subject omitted. This is not an elision for stylistic motives, but rather a grammatically motivated omission. It is only met with in that distinct idiom to which Jaroslav Černý and Sarah Groll have dedicated their Late Egyptian Grammar (Černý / Groll, *Late Egyptian grammar*); it is non-literary, documentary Late Egyptian, or “Černý’s Late Egyptian.”

The conditions for the unimembral sentence in this idiom are syntactic situations that ask for a clause, rather than for a noun. So we can, for instance, expect a clause after an initial *r-dd*.

(10) P. BM 10284, 7–8 (*LRL* 48, 16–49,1)



² Shisha-Halevy, in: Junge (ed.), *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens*, 176–177.

t=k rh-t r-dd rmt jw bn ʿzʿf m-djʿʿ N ‘You know, he is a man who does not have his influence (?) (anymore) at all’ (literally, ‘whose influence (?) is not at all with him’; clause of circumstance in attributive function, to an indefinite noun).

If we find a noun in such a slot it will automatically be understood as a clause. Such environments include phrases following expressions like *r-dd*, *hr-ntt*, *jr* plus noun.

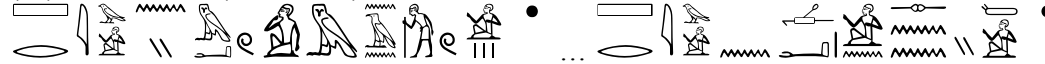
Groll, Non-verbal sentence, gives these cases: *r-dd* A Ø ‘to wit: it is A’ (p. 18), *nm* A Ø ‘who is A?’ (p. 19), *nfr* Ø ‘A is good’ (p. 40), *bn* A *jwn3* Ø ‘he/it is not A’ (p. 94), *bn m3ʿ.t jwn3* Ø ‘it is not true’ (p. 109).

(11) Gardiner inscription N 22 (Gardiner, inscription of Mes)



t-tw hr dd r-dd šrj n nšj ‘They say that he is the son of Noishe.’

(12) Prince 6, 8–9 (*LES* 5, 4–5)



šrj NM m n3-n-srw ... šrj n wʿ-n-snn ‘Whose son of the princes is he? ... He is the son of a warrior’

(13) P. BM 10052, 14, 14–15 (*GTR* plate xxxiv)



dd nšf nm 2x ‘They said to him: Who and who were they?’

(14) P. Mayer A 3, 23 (Peet 1920; *KRI* VI, 810, 9–10).



hr jr pr-ʿ3 ʿ. w. d. hry nm m-r-ʿ ‘(As for Pharaoh, l.p.h., how will he ever reach this land (scil. Nubia?)) And as for Pharaoh, l.p.h., whose superior is he (still) after all?’

An additional case is the noun following the particle *n* (*jn*) introducing YES/NO questions, ‘I he/she/it ...?’ as is frequently found with oracle queries.

(15) O. IFAO 68,1 (see Černý, BIFAO 41, 1941: 18 #33)



n ʿd3 n3-(i)dd[ʿj?] ‘Is it wrong what I said?’

(16) O. IFAO 999 (see Černý, BIFAO 72, 1972: 57 #57)



n rmt drdr ‘Is it a foreigner?’

Other attestations are Černý, BIFAO 72, 1972: 57 #58; 58 #62, 59 #64, 65 #85. #86. #87, 66 #88. #90.

In the following, the interrogative particle is absent; never the less, the unimembral construction is attested.

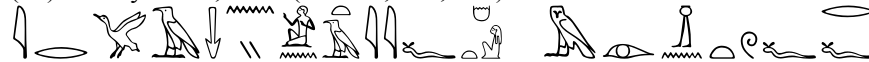
(17) O. IFAO 1000 (see Černý, BIFAO 72, 1972: 61 #73)



p3-3 hrjw md3yw ‘Is it the three Medjay chiefs?’

Absence of the interrogative particle is also found in the examples Černý, BIFAO 72, 1972: 65 #85, #87; 66 #90. The unimembral sentence is also found after *jr* ‘if’ (Satzinger, *Neuägyptische Studien*, 57: 1.3.2.1.2.1). There is, however, a problem with this pattern. *jr* plus NOUN may be either *#jr* NOUN#, ‘as for NOUN’ (anticipation of a noun), or *#jr* CLAUSE#, ‘if he/it is NOUN’ (clause of condition, with unimembral sentence). The decision between the two homonymous constructions must be made from the context. In the following, it was the wrong decision that was made as long as the translator was not aware of the existence of the unimembral sentence and its conditions. The first author to treat Nominal Sentences in Late Egyptian that consist of one member only, was probably Sarah Israelit Groll (Non-verbal sentence, 12–40), in what she terms the “A Ø pattern.” She could already account for some conditions for this phenomenon.

(18) P. Mayer A 3, 9–10 (*KRI* VI, 809, 4–5).



jr p3-sn n tzyf-hmt m-jr jn-twʿf rʿf ‘If he is the brother of his (= the accused’s) wife, do not let him be brought against him.’ It is not ‘As for the brother of his wife,’ as — e.g. — Peet, Mayer Papyri A & B, thought.

(19) P. BM 10052, 4, 24 (GTR plate XXVIII).



jr p3-m3ʿ nty jwʿj (r) ddʿf bn ddʿj rmt nb ʿptrʿj ʿrm b-h3ʿf ‘If it is the truth what I’m meant to say, will I not name every person that I’ve seen with Be-khaʿef?’

(20) P. Turin 1882 rto 2, 9f. (GUNN 1955, plate VIII).



jr 3tʿ jrʿj m knbt jw m3ʿt m ʿk3ʿs ‘If it is (just) a moment that I spent at court, justice was in good order!’

Another condition for the unimembral sentence is the apodosis after *jr* plus NOUN, ‘as for ...’:

(21) Two Brothers 8,3–4 (LES 17, 11–12)

(Highlighted:) You are to do something for me. (But what is it?)



hr jr p3-nty jwʿk r jrʿf nʿj p3yʿk-jj.t r nwy.tʿj ‘But what you shall do for me is to come and look after me’ (literally, ‘As for that which you are to do for me, it is your coming to look after me’).

(22) P. Mayer A 3, 23 (Peet, Mayer Papyri A & B; KRI VI, 810, 9–10).



jr p3y-rmt p3-jry n b-h3ʿf ‘As for this man, he is the accomplice of Be-khaʿef.’

Typology

In general, an unimembral surface form is often the result of elision or omission of one member. The member to elide is of course not the predicate (the rhematic element) as the central element of the utterance, but rather the subject (the thematic element). The phenomenon of omitted subjects will be met with particularly in direct speech, and rather in casual than in formal speech. But apart from such omissions, there can be met genuine unimembral constructions. The difference is that otherwise the subject *may* be omitted, whereas in a genuine unimembral sentence the subject *must* be omitted, or rather: in a unimembral sentence there is no overt subject. It is a truly unimembral sentence.

To sum up: in non-literary Late Egyptian, the pronominal subject of the third person, of a nominal predicate, is suppressed under certain conditions, which all have in common that its theme (= pronominal subject’s of the third person) follows from the context.

If looking for Semitic parallels, we meet, first of all, with a terminological difficulty. What Semitic language studies term “nominal sentence” comprises sentences with a nominal predicate as well as an adverbial predicate. Actually, there is not such a fundamental difference between the two of them in Semitic languages, as there is in Egyptian (this being one of the conspicuous “African” traits of this language³). The evidence is summed up in the seminal article by Cohen (Orientalia 87, 2018, 184–206). The majority of the evidence quoted there is with adverbial predicates.

(23) Bibl. Hebrew: 2. Chron. 16, 10; Cohen’s example no. (7)

כִּי בָּזַעַר עִמּוֹ, עַל-זֹאת

kī bā-záʿap ʿimm-ō, ʿal-zōt ‘for (scil. he was) in wrath (i.e., furious) with him, because of that.’

This expression follows on ‘(King) Asa was angry with the seer and put him in prison’: it is clear who is ‘he’ (the king), and who is ‘him’ (the seer). The subject-less predicate, *bā-záʿap* ‘in wrath,’ is an adverbial one.

Anyway, in Hebrew (nor anywhere else in Semitic) there is not the question of obligatory dropping of subject, as in the case of Late Egyptian.

We may, however, compare the source of the Akkadian stative.⁴ It has pronominal elements (*-ku*, *-ta*, *-ti* etc.) in the 1st and 2nd persons only,

parsaku < **parisā-ku*, *parsata* < **parisā-ta*, *parsati* < **parisā-ti*,

whereas the 3rd person forms are obviously of nominal morphology:

paris < **parisa*, pl. *parsu* < **parisū*, f. *parsat* < **parisata*, pl. *parsā* < **parisā* (cf. Kienast, Hist. Semitische Sprachwissenschaft, 202–204 § 182).

³ Cf. Satzinger African Language; Satzinger, in: Cervelló Autuori (ed.), *África antigua*, 257–265.

⁴ Buccellati, JNES 27, 1968, 1–12; Huehnergard, JARCE 47, 1987, 215–232; Tropper, in: Dietrich / Loretz (eds.), *Vom Alten Orient*; Satzinger, in: Voigt (ed.), *From Beyond the Mediterranean*, 496–497; Satzinger, in: Collombert / Lefèvre / Polis / Winand (eds.), *Aere perennius*, 685–696.

Similarly, the synthetic past conjugation of Neo-Aramaic shows pronominal elements in the first and second persons only.⁵

(24) North Eastern Neo-Aramaic: present tense

*pātiḥ- ‘to open’:

1 sing masc/fem	<i>pāthin/pāthan</i>	= <i>pātiḥ/pāthā</i> + <i>-n</i> (< <i>ana</i> ‘I’; Hoberman 1988: 561)
2 sing masc/fem	<i>pāthit/pāthat</i>	= <i>pātiḥ/pāthā</i> + <i>-t</i> (< <i>at</i> ‘you’: communis!)
3 sing masc/fem	<i>pātiḥ/pāthā</i>	(without pronoun!)
1 plur com	<i>pāthax</i>	= <i>pāthī</i> + <i>ax</i> (< <i>axnan</i> , <i>axniy</i> ‘we’)
2 plur com	<i>pāthītūn</i>	= <i>pāthī</i> + <i>tūn</i> (< <i>axtun</i> ‘you’)
3 plur com	<i>pāthī</i>	(without pronoun!)

In fact, there are languages that do regularly drop a pronominal subject of the 3rd person. For the African continent, WALS (chapter 13) knows of five items, three of which (Mbay, So, Nandi) are Nilo-Saharan languages; none is Afro-Asiatic. It is obviously neither an areal, nor a genetic feature.

Tommo So	Niger–Congo? / Dogon
Katla	Kordofanian / Katla-Tima
Mbay	Central Sudanic / Bongo-Bagirmi
So	Eastern Sudanic / Kuliak
Nandi	Eastern Sudanic / Nilotic

For example:

(25) So (Carlin, *So Language*, 79)

	Singular	Plural
1 inclusive		-(i)ine
1 exclusive	-(i)sa	-(i)ise
2	-(i)ba	-(i)ide
3	Ø-	Ø-

Languages with a zero pronoun of the 3rd person are somewhat more frequent in the Americas. Here is one example, namely Navajo (quoted by Satzinger, in: Amstutz / Dorn / Müller / Ronsdorf / Uljas (eds.), *Fuzzy Boundaries*, 248).

(26) Navajo (Hale, *Navajo Linguistics*, 33):

	adverbial prefix	subject person marker	classifier	stem
Singular 1st person:	<i>na-</i>	<i>-sh-</i>	<i>-l-</i>	<i>-nish</i>
2nd person:	<i>na-</i>	<i>-ni-</i>	<i>-l-</i>	<i>-nish</i>
3rd person:	<i>na</i>	<i>-Ø-</i>	<i>-l-</i>	<i>-nish</i>
Plural 1st person:	<i>na-</i>	<i>-ii-</i>	<i>-l-</i>	<i>-nish</i>
2nd person:	<i>na-</i>	<i>-oh-</i>	<i>-l-</i>	<i>-nish</i>
3rd person:	<i>na</i>	<i>-Ø-</i>	<i>-l-</i>	<i>-nish</i>

Nominal subject: *’ashkii naalnish* ‘a boy is working.’

In all these languages the construction with a zero pronoun of the third person differs structurally from that of Late Egyptian. It is exclusively found in verbal sentences, in verbal utterances. In Late Egyptian, however, it is a phenomenon restricted to the nominal sentence. A verbal form, even if not containing any information about its subject, is understood as a predicate; a noun is not (except in languages with a predicative or absolute case form). Navajo *naalnish* is ‘(someone, or he/she) is working.’ However, Late Egyptian *rmt drdr* means ‘a foreign man,’ a noun phrase that may appear in any syntactic function. The zero subject is not attested in Late Egyptian verbal sentences (except as expression of an unpersonal subject), and in nominal sentences only under the precondition that the context makes it clear that the noun is predicative: under the conditions mentioned above (following on *hr nty*, or *r ḏd*, or *n*, etc.): ‘because he is, that he is, whether he is a foreigner, etc.’ This is a remarkable and, as it seems, unparalleled feature of Late Egyptian.

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⁵ Lipiński, *Semitic Languages*, 431, 42.19.

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