

# Dialectical Variation of the Egyptian-Coptic Language in the Course of Its Four Millennia of Attested History

## Abstract

A language with a long documented history may be expected to show a great deal of dialectal diversity. For Egyptian-Coptic there are particular conditions. Except for the Delta, the country is one-dimensional, a feature that may make the distribution of dialectal differences simpler than in a country with a normal areal extension. Another specific feature is that all Egyptian idioms that precede Coptic are transmitted without the vowels, thereby obscuring all vocalic differences (which play such a great role in Coptic dialect variation). However, recent research has revealed that in the earliest stages of Egyptian language history there was a drastic dialectal gap. The feature best visible is the phonetic value and the etymology of graphemes *ʿayin* and *ʒ*.

When Herodotus said that Egypt is a gift of the Nile, he was speaking of Lower Egypt, of the Delta: this whole area, with a north–south extension of ca. 170 km (in a bee-line) and an east–west extension of ca. 260 km, owes its existence to all the soil that the river Nile has brought down from the Sudan in the course of a long time-span. However, most people think that he wanted to say that Egypt (as we intend it), from the Tropic of Cancer to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, would not exist without the waters of the Nile, as there would be nothing but desert. Egypt is bipartite: on the one hand, a small country like others, of triangular shape; on the other, the two long and narrow shores of a river that crosses an endless desert. Whereas the Delta is two-dimensional, like any other country, the Valley is one-dimensional, a narrow strip. The one-dimensional nature of the Valley has consequences for the question of dialects. It is to be assumed that the language of this area is in gradual dialectal transition from one end to the other. This is usually not so in a two-dimensional area.

Coptic dialect variation does not seem to be very conspicuous in view of a language history of some 4000 years, in its last phase. The table entitled “Characteristic Lexemes in the Principal Coptic Dialects and Sub-dialects” in the *Coptic Encyclopedia* gives a good impression of the morphological, phonetic and lexicographic differences.<sup>1</sup> Many of these are in a linear order (north – south), others deviate from it in a certain measure. The reflex of the short Egyptian stress-bearing vowels, *\*á* and *\*é* (the latter a merger of *\*í* and *\*ú*) is in an interesting

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<sup>1</sup> KASSER, 1991b: 88–96.

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distribution—not at all linear, as might be expected. The old vowel qualities are preserved in many Nile Valley dialects:<sup>2</sup> F, V, M, L (in several varieties), A; key words are **caN** “brother,” **peN** (**xeN**) “name.” The Delta dialect (B), on the other hand, has \*ɔ and \*a, respectively, and this is also true of Sahidic; key words are **con** “brother,” **paN** “name.” As long as the “big” dialects are taken into consideration, this is the impression that we get: B and S, as against all the rest. However, as soon as idioms are included that are only preserved in a comparably small number of texts, the image changes: along the Valley we find *é* / *á* dialects obviously alternating with *á* / *ó* dialects, or rather side by side with them.

*á* / *ó* dialects *versus* *é* / *á* dialects:

B	F	M	S	L	I	A	P	Egn.	Meaning
<i>son</i>	<i>san</i>	<i>san</i>	<i>son</i>	<i>san</i>	<i>son</i>	<i>san</i>	<i>son</i>	<i>*san</i>	brother
<i>ran</i>	<i>len</i>	<i>ren</i>	<i>ran</i>	<i>ren</i>	<i>ran</i>	<i>ren</i>	<i>ran</i>	<i>*rin</i>	name

This has been interpreted historically as the result of the intrusion into Upper Egypt of a Lower Egyptian idiom that was of higher prestige at that time, the Saite period (664–525 BCE).<sup>3</sup> This resulted in the coming into existence of mixed dialects: local Upper Egyptian varieties, which had, however, the vocalism of the Delta idioms in the stressed syllables. In the periods to follow, one of them—which was based on the proto-form of Lycopolitan—gained superregional importance: Sahidic. This scenario may account for the distribution of Lower and Upper Egyptian features along the Nile Valley.

Other dialectal features correspond more clearly to the one-dimensional character of the Valley. The pre-Coptic palatalisation (to be dated to the second half of the first millennium BCE) affected the velar stops *k*, *g* and the velar fricative *ħ* [x]. In fact, the Coptic idiom of Lower Egypt (B) displays the full effect of this development: *k* (kh) > čh, *g* and *k* > č; *ħ* > š. The majority of the Valley dialects go only half the way: though *ħ* becomes a palatal fricative, š, the velar (or uvular) stops *k*, *g* and *k* will only be partly palatalised: *kʲ*, but will not develop into a palatal affricate like č. The southernmost dialect, however, seems reluctant in this:<sup>4</sup> in Akhmimic literary texts, but also in Sahidic non-literary texts from Thebes and Elephantine,<sup>5</sup> the velar pronunciation is often preserved, according to the spelling: palatalisation is avoided. For the velar fricative, even a special sign was developed in Akhmimic, ʒ, whereas the non-literary texts in Sahidic (to which idiom this sign is alien) employ ʒ, the normal *h* sign, for want of a better alternative. Two “sporadic dialects”<sup>6</sup> obviously have a sound that is transitory between original (and Akhmimic) [x] and the new palatal [j] of the more northern idioms, namely dialect I (called “Proto-Lycopolitan”) with the sign 𐪓, and dialect P (called “Proto-Theban”) with the sign 9, both assumed to render [ç].

<sup>2</sup> B(ohairic), F(aiyumic), M(iddle Egyptian = Mesokemic), S(ahidic), L(ycopolitan), I(saiah, Ascension of = Proto-Lycopolitan), A(khmimic), P(ROTO-Theban = *P.Bodmer VI*).

<sup>3</sup> SATZINGER, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> KAHLE, 1954: 147 (no. 126).

<sup>5</sup> SATZINGER, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> KASSER, 1991a.

B	F	M	S	L	I, P	A	Egyptian
ϣ [ʃ]					ϣ, ϣ̣ [ç]	ϣ [x]	ḥ <sub>1</sub>
σ [ch] / ϣ [c]	σ [ç]					κ	ḥ, k, g

A particular north–south dichotomy is also conspicuous in another case, which sets Bohairic apart from the rest. Where the other idioms have the stops *p*, *t*, and *k* (π, τ, κ, respectively), Bohairic distinguishes between these and the corresponding aspirates, namely ϕ [ph], θ [th], and χ [kh]; note that these signs have preserved in Coptic the old Greek pronunciation that was applied until ca. 300 BCE among Greek-speakers.<sup>7</sup> To these may be added σ which is, in Bohairic only, the aspirated peer [ch] of ϣ [c]. The aspirate signs are used in Bohairic if the sound originates in Egyptian *p*, *t*, *ṭ*, or *k*, respectively. However, this applies only where the stop is followed by the stress-bearing vowel: ϕε “heaven,” θο “land,” σοις “lord,” χημι “Egypt”; cf. the Sahidic forms πε, το, ṭοε, κημε.

Functions of ϣ and σ in dialectal variation:	
Bohairic	Valley Dialects
ϣ [c] < ḏ; k, g	ϣ [c] < ḏ, ṭ
σ [ch] < ṭ; k	σ [ç] < k, k, g

Things are, however, still more complicated. There is also another condition under which Bohairic writes the aspirate signs ϕ [ph], θ [th], σ [ch], χ [kh] instead of the non-aspirate signs π, τ, σ, κ, respectively, namely when they are followed by one of the liquids and a vowel, as in B ϕρη (S πρη) “the sun”; ϕρο “the mouth”; σρο “to become strong”; χμομ “to become black.”

An additional shift (southern Egypt only) concerns L and A δʹ for áʹ:

B	F	M	S	L	A	
<i>toʃf</i>	<i>taʃf</i>	<i>tʃf</i>	<i>toʃf</i>	<i>toʃf</i>	<i>toʃf</i>	*čáʔtʃ > *čáʔtʃ “his hand”
<i>ro</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>ra</i>	<i>ro</i>	<i>ro</i>	<i>ro</i>	*raʔ “mouth”

The colouring of accented á before a glottal stop is only reflected in the southernmost dialects, L and A. In these same dialects, the ō of BFS is realised as ũ [u:], if < \*ōʹ < \*āʹ, as against the ō of all other dialects. On the other hand, M realises an unconditioned ō (that is, when not originally followed by a glottal stop) as o [ɔ:]. The colouring of accented á before a glottal stop is the oldest dialectal difference of Coptic, as it is first attested in the Amarna period (ca. 1350–1330 BCE). This is made visible by renderings of Egyptian words in Middle Babylonian cuneiform, which has signs containing *u* in pertinent cases.<sup>8</sup>


<sup>7</sup> SATZINGER, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> OSING, 1976: 348.










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The latest sound shift is a lenition of the velar fricative [x] to *h*:

B	F	M	S	L	A	< Egyptian
ⲃ [x]	Ⲉ [h]				Ⲉ [x]	< Ⲉ, Ⲉ <sub>2</sub> [x]

It happened around 200 CE in all Valley dialects, except those in the utmost south (notably *A*). Equally, the Delta dialect preserved the old pronunciation [x]. It is here spelled with the old sign ⲃ (going ultimately back to the hieroglyph of the lotus plant  with the sound value *h*ʒ), whereas *A* created a new sign for it by adding a diacritic stroke to the *h* sign, namely Ⲉ. The innovation occurred in the large centre of the Coptic speaking area.

The major differences between the Coptic dialects are obviously not older than the mid-first millennium BCE, to which may be added the shift *a*ʹ > *o*ʹ of some idioms that is attested before 1400 BCE.<sup>9</sup> It can hardly be imagined that Egyptian was uniform until then, the less so as we have some literary evidence of a remarkable diversity: “As for your utterances, there is no translator who could understand them. They are like the conversation of a Delta man with a man from Elephantine!”<sup>10</sup> Already in the *Story of Sinuhe* of the early Middle Kingdom we read: “It was like a dream—as if a Delta-man saw himself in Yebu [Elephantine], a marshman in Nubia.”<sup>11</sup> This seems to point to great differences in language in the second millennium BCE. In fact, the linguistic research of recent times has made it plausible that an enormous gap existed between the two main dialects from ca. 3300 BCE onwards.

An exemplary feature is the phonetics of graphemes  ʒ (Egyptian vulture) and  ʕ (arm with hand), including all other signs that contain these values (like ʕʒ, *wʒ*, *bʒ*, *pʒ*, and so on; or *ʒw*, *ʒb*; or *bʒk*, *hʒʕ*, *wʒh*, and so on). Whereas the traditional opinion is that ʒ and ʕ render the glottal stop [ʔ] and the ʕayin [ʕ] sound of Arabic, respectively, there is evidence of a more complex situation.<sup>12</sup> There is strong evidence for ʕ being originally a dental stop, which is based on its compatibility with others classes of sounds.<sup>13</sup> Incompatibility is a feature that is familiar from Semitic languages, in particular Arabic.<sup>14</sup> In the lexicon of the Old Kingdom, Egyptian ʕ is incompatible with dentals/alveolars, in particular with *d* and *z*.<sup>15</sup> There are no roots with \*ʕd, \*ʕCd, \*ʕdʕ, \*ʕCʕd, \*ʕCdʕ, \*ʕʕz, \*ʕʕCz, \*ʕʕzʕ, \*ʕʕCʕz, \*ʕʕCzʕ. On the other hand, it is compatible with laryngeals ( *h*,  *h*,  *h*,  *ʕ* [*< h*]) and with all velars and palatals, except *k* and *t*—hence with  *g*,  *k*, and  *t* (> *k*). This proves that ʕ was—originally—not a laryngeal itself, but rather a dental or alveolar sound.

A horror for every Semitist: roots that show that ʕ is compatible with *h*:

ʕ*hi* “to burn, evaporate”; ʕ*h* “brazier”; ʕ*hi* “to raise up, rise up”; ʕ*hm* “to quench, extinguish”; ʕ*hm* “to fly”; ʕ*bhn* “frog”; ʕ*nh* “sandal strap”; ʕ*nh* “to live, be alive”; ʕ*nh* “garland, bouquet”; ʕ*nh* “door leaf”; ʕ*th* “to sieve,

<sup>9</sup> SATZINGER, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> *Papyrus Anastasi* I, 28, 6 (19th Dynasty).

<sup>11</sup> *Sinuhe* 224–225 (translation LICHTHEIM, 1973: 231).

<sup>12</sup> SATZINGER, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> RÖSSLER, 1971.

<sup>14</sup> VERNET I PONS, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> BREIN, 2009.

press”; *ṭḥ* “brewer”; *nḥ* “bundle” (unit of measure); *ḥi* “to appear (in glory), be shining”; *ḥr* “to rage”; *ḥr* “to enrage”; *ḥz* “to throw, put, leave”; *ḥf* “to grasp”; *ḥf* “fist, grasp.”

Roots that show that *ḥ* is compatible with *h*:

*ḥ* “palace”; *ḥz* “to fight”; *ḥḥ* “to stand”; *ḥi* “to rejoice, be happy”; *ḥw* “fleet, cargo boat”; *ḥb* “to play”; *ḥpj* “the Nile, flood”; *ḥḥ* “to fill (a jug) to the brim,” etc.; *ḥḥb.t* “pied kingfisher”; *jḥ* “moon”; *bḥ* “flood, inundation”; *sḥ* “rank, dignity”; *kḥ* “to bend down”; *ḥzḥy* “turmoil”; *ḥw* “to be short”; *ḥn* “with”; *wh* “to loosen, explain”; *ḏḥ* “leather, (leather) lacings”; *ḥw* “flesh, limbs, body, self,” and so on.

The discoverer of this evidence, Otto Rössler, presented a number of Semitic etymologies that should show that Egyptian *ḥayn* corresponds to alveolar and dental occlusives on the Semitic side.<sup>16</sup> Here is a selection. Comparisons are limited to Semitic, the best known and most intensively studied branch of Afro-Asiatic; for references to Berber, Cushitic, Omotic, and Chadic compare the references given.

*ḥayn* corresponding to Semitic \*d:<sup>17</sup>

<i>ḥ</i> “hand”	Sem. *yad-, <i>idem</i>
<i>ḥz</i> “doorwing”	Sem. *dal-at, <i>idem</i>
<i>ḥz</i> “to command (a ship)” (Pyr)	Arab. <i>dabbara</i> (II.) “to contrive, administer”

*ḥayn* corresponding to Semitic \*z (< \*dz):<sup>18</sup>

<i>ḥn</i> “to be beautiful”	Arab. <i>zāna</i> “to embellish, decorate” (*zyn)
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*ḥayn* corresponding to Semitic \*ḏ (< \*dḏ):<sup>19</sup>

<i>ḥf</i> “fly” (insect)	Sem. *ḏbb, <i>idem</i>
<i>nbḥ</i> “to take out, remove”	Arab. <i>nbḏ</i> “eliminate”

*ḥayn* corresponding to Semitic \*ḏ (ḥ):<sup>20</sup>

<i>jḥj</i> “to wash”	Arab. <i>waḏuʿa</i> “to become clean, make clean”
<i>wḥb</i> “to clean”	Arab. <i>waḏaba</i> “to arrange, put in order”

16 RÖSSLER, 1971.

17 RÖSSLER, 1971: 285–286.

18 RÖSSLER, 1971: 291.

19 RÖSSLER, 1971: 288.

20 RÖSSLER, 1971: 293.

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On the other hand, however, numerous etymologies have been suggested in which Egyptian *ʿayn* corresponds to Semitic \*ʿ or \*ʕ.<sup>21</sup> Many of them are plausible and suggestive. Some examples.

*ʿAyn* corresponding to Semitic \*ʿ:

*jʿr* var. *ʿrj* “to mount up, bring up”  
*ʿnn* “to return, turn back”

*ʿr* (= *jʕrw*, *jʕl*) “rush”  
*ʕʕ* “to begin”  
*dbʿ* “finger”

Heb. *ʿālā* “to rise, ascend”; Arab. *ʿaliya* “to move up”<sup>22</sup>  
 Sem. \*ʿny; Akk. *enû* “to turn back”; Heb. *ʿānā* “to answer”<sup>23</sup> (cf. Arab. *ʿanna* “to encounter [on the road, etc.]”)  
 Heb. *ʿāleḥ* “foliage, leaf, frond”<sup>24</sup>  
 Akk. *šurrû*; Arab. *šaraʿa*, *idem* (Sem. \*šrʿ)<sup>25</sup>  
 Heb. *ʿēšbaʿ*; Arab. *ʿiṣbaʿ*<sup>26</sup>

*ʿAyn* corresponding to Semitic \*ʕ:

*ʕn* “to cover, be covered”  
*ʕf* “to wrap”  
*ʕd* “to be intact”  
*ʕb* “to become pleasant, desirable”

Sem. \*ʕfn; Modern South Arabian, “to cover”<sup>27</sup>  
 Sem. \*ʕlp; Heb. *ʿulāp* “be covered” (puʿal); Arab. *ʕalafa* “cover”<sup>28</sup>  
 Arab. *ʕadd-* “fresh, soft” (Sem. \*ʕdd)<sup>29</sup>  
*ʕarīb-* “strange, astonishing, amazing”<sup>30</sup>

Whereas Semitic \*d and \*z (etc.) correspond, on the one hand, to Egyptian *ʿayn*, there are also etymologies with a correspondence of Semitic \*d (etc.) to Egyptian *d*, rather than *ʿayn*.

*dkw* “flour”

*wdn* “to become heavy”  
*jdn* \* “ear”

Akk. *daqqu*; Heb. *daq*; Arab. *diqq-* “fine, thin, well-ground, etc.”<sup>31</sup>  
 Arab. *wazana* “to weigh,” *wazuna* “to become heavy”<sup>32</sup>  
 Sem. \*ʕuðn-, *idem*<sup>33</sup>

<sup>21</sup> ERMAN, 1892; CALICE, 1936; TAKÁCS, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 94.

<sup>23</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 93.

<sup>24</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 94.

<sup>25</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 97.

<sup>26</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 98.

<sup>27</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 93.

<sup>28</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 93.

<sup>29</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 95.

<sup>30</sup> SATZINGER, 1999: 144.

<sup>31</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 245.

<sup>32</sup> CALICE, 1936: 59 (no. 171).

<sup>33</sup> TAKÁCS, 1999: 248.

What is the matter then: does Egyptian *ʿayn* correspond to Semitic \**ʿ* or \**ʕ*, or to Semitic \**d*, \**z*, \**ḏ*, \**ḏ*? The answer could come from a further phenomenon. There are pairs of roots, whose meaning is similar or alike, that have *ʿ* and *d*, respectively, as one of their radicals, like the following:<sup>34</sup>

“hand”	ʿ( <i>j</i> ) :	<i>dj</i>
“here”	ʿ <i>ʒ</i> :	<i>dj</i> (<* <i>dʒ</i> ?)
“to squirt”	*ʿ <i>ʒ</i> :	* <i>dʒ</i>
“to push”	*ʿ <i>b</i> :	* <i>db</i>

This looks like a great example of dialect variation: one of two idioms has kept the original pronunciation of dental and alveolar occlusives, whereas the other one has lenitioned them to a laryngeal contraction.

So much for the Egyptian *ʿayin*. The evidence for *ʒ* yields comparable results. There are words with *ʒ* (presumably with a sound value [ʔ]) that appear in Late Egyptian, and/or Demotic, and/or Coptic, with *l* or *r* in its place).<sup>35</sup> Now it can be imagined that *r* and/or *l* develops into a glottal stop, but certainly not the inverse in a regular way. This means that the later attested forms (with *l*) are the original ones, whereas the earlier attested form with *ʒ* is secondary.

*hʒ*, LEgn. *hl* “would that!”  
*hʒg*, LEgn. *hlg* “to be glad”; dem. *hlk* “sweet”; Copt. ⲭⲗⲟⲥ “to become sweet” (cf. Arab. *hilw*- “sweet”).  
*hʒʒ*, dem. *hlpy*; Copt. ⲭⲗⲡⲉ “navel” (cf. Sem. \**ḥabl*- “rope”).  
*kʒnt* (Pyramid Texts), *kʒʒt* (Middle Kingdom); *k(ʒ)rt* (New Kingdom); dem. *kʒt*; Copt. (S) ⲕⲗⲁⲉ “deadbolt.”

Furthermore, there is ample evidence for words with *ʒ* that have spelling variants or doublets with *n* instead.<sup>36</sup>

*nh*, *nš*, *ʒš* “to vomit” (alternation *h* : *š* is due to palatalisation).  
*nʿʿ* “to become smooth,” *ʒʿʿ* “to plaster.”  
*ʒhw* “pain, injury”; *nhw* “loss, lack.”  
*mʒʒ* “to see”; subjunctive *mʒn.f* besides *mʒ.f*.  
*nwr*, *ʒwr* “to tremble.”  
*ʒʿb*, *ndb* “damage, wound” (with additional alternation ʿ : *d*).  
*wjn*, *wjʒ* “to reject.”  
*znš*, *z(ʒ)š* “to open.”  
*hfn*, *hnf*, *hʒʒ* “to twist” (includes *metathesis*).  
*gnf*, *gʒf* “to rebuff, repell.”  
*fgn*, *fʒʒ* “to defecate.”  
*nsb*, *ʒsb* “to burn.”  
*Nkdkd*, var. *ʒkdkd*, name of a god.  
*ʿwn* “to rob, deceive”; *ʿwʒj* “to rob, harvest.”  
 Etc.

34 ZEIDLER, 1992: 206–10; SCHENKEL, 1993: 140; SATZINGER, 1999: 141–151.

35 SATZINGER, 1994.

36 SATZINGER, 1994.

In other instances, *ʒ* is in variation with *r*, but this case is different. In spellings of the Pyramid Texts, *r* in certain positions may appear in writing as *ʒ*.<sup>37</sup> Towards the end of the Old Kingdom any *r*, as also any *t*, that is in syllable-closing position, mutates into a glottal stop, sometimes spelled with *ʃ*. In a few such cases, such as *hkr* (\**həkár* > \**həkáʔ*, Copt.  $\chi\kappa\omicron$ ) “to become hungry,” or *dr̥t.k* (\**dártak* > \**dáʔtak*, Copt.  $\tau\omicron\omicron\tau\bar{\kappa}$ ), the Pyramid Texts spell it as if the *r* were *ʒ* (for instance, spelling *hkr* as if it were *hʒʒ* “to rule”). At first sight, one might interpret this as a direct testimony of the sound-change mentioned. But most probably the spelling with *ʒ* intends to indicate that here, on the contrary, an [r] is to be pronounced, according to the ceremonious character of the genre. Be that as it may: it is a testimony to the similarity of the pronunciation of *ʒ* and *r*. Further attestations are:

*dʒwt* “hand(full),” originally “hands” (*dárwət*): *r* in syllable-final position; but the singular form, absolute state, is always *drt* (*dárət*, Copt. ⲧⲱⲣⲉ), where the *r* is between two vowels.

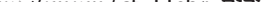
*drijw*, var. *d3ijw*, “has been hindered.”

*d3p* (Pyramid Texts) for *drp* (Middle Kingdom) “to endow” (cf. Arab. *ṭalaf*- “present”).

*grh*, var. *g3h*, "to squeeze."

Above we have seen evidence of two idioms, or dialects, of which one—the progressive—realised the *l* of the other one—the conservative—in a way that was rendered as *ʒ* (but in spelling, *l* was distinguished from *r* and *n* only from the Ramesside period onward). In other cases—in the Old and Middle Kingdom, *ʒ* appears in variation with *n*: probably this is the same phenomenon, namely a dialectal variation of *l* (here spelled *n*) and *ʒ*, no doubt realised as a glottal stop. On the other hand, in some spellings of the Pyramid Texts *ʒ* graphemes are probably used to render *r* phonetically.

Moreover, there is remarkable evidence that points in the same direction. In the Earlier Transcription System, in the Old and Middle Kingdom, for rendering Canaanite personal names and geographical terms (Middle Kingdom type groupwriting),<sup>38</sup> the *ʒ* graphemes are systematically used for Canaanite *l*, more rarely *r*.<sup>39</sup> Here are just three examples among many:

 <3w+w - š3+3 - m - m - FOREIGN COUNTRY > (u)lu-šal-m-m =  
 \*<sup>2</sup>Urusalimum (cf. Hebr. ירושלים *Yərušaláyim*)

<? - s - q - l - nu - FOREIGN COUNTRY > ?*asqalanu* = \*?*Asqalānu* (cf. Hebr. אשקלון  
*?Ašqəlōn*)

 =  <sup>?</sup> - w - l - ta - FOREIGN COUNTRY > <sup>?</sup>*u-la-či* = \*<sup>?</sup>*Ullaza*

37 EDEL, 1955: 57 (§ 129).







38 RÖSSLER, 1966; HOCH, 1994: 488–504.

39 SATZINGER, 1994.



To sum up: (1) some words with *ʒ* have late spellings with *l* instead. Many words with *ʒ* have doublets with *n*: note that before Late Egyptian there existed no convention to express *l*, except *n*; (2) in the Pyramid Texts there are spellings with *ʒ* instead of *r* in positions where *r* was about to be lenitioned to *ʔ*; most probably, the spelling with *ʒ* should indicate a conservative pronunciation with [r]; (3) the older transcription system for foreign names and words, of the Old and Middle Kingdom,<sup>40</sup> employs *ʒ* to express Semitic [l] (more rarely [r]); the Egyptian *r* sign, on the other hand, was used to render Semitic [d] (the Egyptian sound expressed by *d* was a voiceless and probably ejective stop). Taken together with the evidence on *ʕayn*, this points to a drastic dialectal difference: one idiom (the conservative one) preserving by and large the traditional articulation (which is also mirrored in Semitic etymologies), the other one (the progressive one) lenitioning the remaining dental and/or alveolar occlusives to *ʕ*, and the sound *l* perhaps to a glottal stop.

This split-up must have occurred a few centuries before 3000 BCE, the time of the definite unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, and the beginning of Egyptian dynastic history. This is also the time when the Egyptian script began to develop. The question arises which one of the two idioms was at the base of the hieroglyphic script. We think we know now that the Egyptian script developed over a considerable time-span. Nevertheless, we can say that there are strong arguments for assuming that it was created by speakers of the progressive idiom.

- The graphemes for *ʒ* tend to be ignored when symbols were generated:<sup>41</sup>  *q* (a slope, or embankment) derives from *qʒj* “to be high”; or *qʒ* “hill”;  *h* (a shelter of light material?) derives from a structure like a porch, *hʒy.t*; the word for the reed, rush () *j* is spelled *jʒr*, wherein the articulation *l* is probably expressed by a compromise spelling *ʒ* plus *r*.<sup>42</sup>
- Some animal names seem to be onomatopoeic, like *ʒ*, the Egyptian vulture : when disturbed, it utters a sound like *ʔaʔaʔaʔaʔaʔa*.<sup>43</sup> This is in agreement with the sound value of *ʒ* in the progressive idiom; the conservative idiom would read *ʔaʔaʔaʔaʔaʔa* as *lalalalalalala*, and therefore never use the *ʒ* hieroglyph for the glottal stop [ʔ]. The cormorant  reads *ʕk*, which is perhaps its name;<sup>44</sup> its cry resembles *ʕāāāk*, though the conservative idiom would pronounce it *\*dāāāk*, quite off the mark.  *jʕʒ* (not *ʕʒ*!) “donkey,” Coptic (S) ⲉⲓⲱ: in the conservative pronunciation this would be something like *\*ʔidāl*, whereas the progressive idiom must have had the familiar sound *\*ʔiʕāʔ*.<sup>45</sup>

Thus the scenario seems to have been as follows. In the second half of the fourth millennium a dialect split occurred; the pronunciation of several phonemes (it was actually more than those mentioned, *\*d*, *\*z*, *\*l*) changed in part of the language area (the south?), in some cases even drastically. This progressive idiom became dominant in the historical Egyptian state, although the conservative idiom survived marginally, at least until the second millennium. Late Egyptian (Ramesside period) was perhaps some sort of compromise: progressive pronunciation, but some conservative vocabulary, in its traditional pronunciation, entered the language; it was

40 RÖSSLER, 1966; HOCH, 1994: 488–504.

41 Cf. EDEL, 1955: 19–20 (§ 43–45).

42 SATZINGER, 1994: 197–198; SATZINGER, in press.

43 SATZINGER, 1994; SATZINGER, 2015.

44 SATZINGER, 1994.

45 SATZINGER, 2015.

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often spelled phonetically (New Kingdom group writing). The second and first millennia saw a substantial standardisation, with development of some vowels: *i* and *u* (both long and short) merged with *e*; *ā* became *ō*. Coptic shows that Lower Egypt preserved the distinction of soft (voiced? ejective?) and hard (aspirated) stops, whereas these were levelled in the Nile Valley. In the middle of the first millennium, in some Lower Egyptian areas, stressed *á* became *ś*, and *é* became *á*. This feature, preserved in Bohairic, spread to Upper Egypt as a sign of prestige and gave rise, *inter alia*, to Sahidic; these idioms preserved, however, the Upper Egyptian consonantal features. Another sound change that occurred in the second half of the first millennium was the palatalisation of all velar sounds, the stops *k*, *k* and *g* and the continuant [x]; yet the extreme south (later the realm of the Akhmimic Coptic dialect) was reticent in this. Around 200 CE a lenition of what had remained of [x] pronunciation occurred, yielding [h]. But this did not affect the extreme south (the realm of Akhmimic), nor the extreme north (the realm of Bohairic).

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HELMUT SATZINGER  
Professor of Egyptology  
Institute for Egyptology  
University of Vienna