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May themes follow on rhemes, and why might they do so?

1. Confusion by terminology

One of the major topics of recent linguistic studies in egyptology is "pragmatics". Since many authors narrow pragmatics down to what is otherwise called "sentence perspective", terms like focus, topic, theme, rheme etc., are record holders. Although relating to a rather limited number of reference works in general linguistics, authors use these terms in a variety of meanings. In the following, I will discuss the use of relevant terminology in two new publications, viz. A. LOPRIENO, "Typological Order,"¹ and W. SCHENKEL, Einführung in die altägyptische Sprachwissenschaft.

1.1 Theme, rheme

When LOPRIENO calls theme and rheme the "pragmatic functions" within the utterance (p. 31), he uses these terms in a way that may be expected. Their sequence, viz. theme–rheme, constitutes, according to him, the "pragmatic order", which is in contrast to the "syntactic order", viz. predicate–subject. In other words: LOPRIENO discerns theme and rheme only in sentences in which the "given" precedes the "new"; so, in particular, in the adverbial sentence, and in nominal sentences of the patterns AZ and AcZ.² Otherwise he says "subject" and "predivcate". Consequently, his "thematic position" is equivalent to the position of the first constituent, whereas "rhematic position" signifies the position of the second constituent (p. 32).

This concept is unduly generalized by SCHENKEL. Theme and rheme are right away defined as meaning first and second position, respectively, in what he calls *Kernsatz* (pp. 132–133). This raises the impression that they have nothing to do with sentence perspective, with a concept of logical subject/predicate, or with pragmatics. Both theme and rheme can be either subject or predicate. Thus, four variations arise. If the first constituent is subject, and the second predicate, SCHENKEL calls them "topic" and "comment", respectively (this is the case of, e.g., the normal adverbial sentence, and the nominal sentence of the patterns AZ and AcZ). If, however, it is the other way round, the constituents are termed "focus" and "presupposition", respectively (this is the case of, e.g., the normal adjectival sentence, *nfr-sw*, and the nominal sentence of the patterns ZA and ZaA).

There are, however, clear indications that also SCHENKEL regards "theme" and "rheme" as having an implication of "pragmatic" character. 1) We are warned that "focus" is not restricted to the meaning mentioned: it may signify any "besonders gewichtete Satzteile". 2) "Theme" is not only used for the first constituent of the sentence proper (or the sentence nucleus, *Kernsatz*), but also for the "head part" (*Kopfteil*). This is SCHENKEL'S term for frontal expansions of the nucleus (p. 131). In particular, "heads" comprise topicalized phrases, either marked by *jr*, or unmarked (p. 179). This

¹ A. Loprieno, On the Typological Order of Constituents, in: Journal of Afroasiatic Languages 1, 1988, 26ff.

² On these symbols, see H. J. Polotsky, Grundlagen des koptischen Satzbaus I, 17–18.

seems to indicate that SCHENKEL'S understanding of "theme" does comprise some notion of topicalization, though he does not explicitly say so.

Both LOPRIENO (p. 41) and SCHENKEL (p. 129) agree that the sequence theme–rheme (LOPRIENO's "pragmatic order") is an unmarked phenomenon. But this statement has a different significance for each of the authors mentioned. LOPRIENO excludes sentences of the sequence predicate–subject from his pragmatic level altogether. SCHENKEL, however, includes such sentences in his theme–rheme concept, their different sentence perspective notwithstanding. Obviously, he regards the nominal sentence patterns ZA and ZaA as focalizing patterns, correlative to patterns AZ and AcZ, respectively.

1.2 Topicalization, focalization

Both authors also agree in stating that the pattern theme–rheme implies topicalisation. Consequently, LOPRIENO must regard topicalization as an unmarked phenomenon (p. 41). SCHENKEL says explicitly that he takes the order subject–predicate (#*jnk* A# type) as the *u n m a r k e d* form of the nominal sentence (p. 129) although a few lines later he calls it *t o p i c a l i z i n g*. In the sentences of the other order, predicate–subject, the "predicative theme" is said to be a mere sub-case of "F o k u s s i e r u n g". I must confess that I feel rather uncomfortable when the first-place position of the theme, or be it topic, in LOPRIENO's "pragmatic order" (e.g., the adverbial sentence) is called "topicalization". Any *...ization* is the expression of a process, or the result of such. Therefore, "topicalization" implies that something *has been made* topic, and "focalization" implies that something *has been put* into the focus. In the typical nominal sentence of the ZA and ZaA patterns, the first element is just the rheme, or be it predicate. It is not raised in any way, apart from its being the rheme:

šhtj pw n Šht-ḥm 'he was a peasant of the Wādy Naṭrūn' Peasant R 1

('it was a good land,') *J33 rn:f* 'whose name was 'Aa' Sinuhe B 81

jt pw s'ḥ n jrr n:f 'the blessed dead man is a father for one who acts for him' Urk. IV, 123,12

nfr pw phrt jrj 'its remedy is a good one' Admon. 4,11

In the nominal sentences of the AZ and AcZ patterns, the same applies to the last (second or third, respectively) element:

jnk ʿš3 mrwt 'I am rich in servants' (LICHTHEIM) Sinuhe B 154–155

j3wt st mnj 'old age is a landing-place' Westcar 7, 17

phrt pw nt ḥʿw:s mrḥt 'oil is the remedy of her body' Ptahhotep 3,28

('as for any god who knows what protects him of Sekhmet') *swt pw wd3 m-ʿtn* 'he is one who is hale among you' CT IV 328c

These are plain nominal sentences, having a rheme and a theme. We should be strict in reserving the term "topicalization" for phenomena like the frontal extraposition, be it with *jr* or without. Or, in particular, for fronted clauses of time like those analyzed by VERNUS (1983)³ in the framework of his

³ P. Vernus, Pascale, Formes "emphatiques" en fonction non "emphatique" dans la protase d'un système corrélatif, GM 43, 1981, 73–88

second schème. A formal characteristic of these topicalized structures is a "comment" that is formed by a complete sentence: 'as for him, h e i s / d o e s ...'; 'when it dawned, very early, o n e c a m e t o c a l l m e'.⁴ And we should reserve "focalization" to utterances with rhematic expressions that are raised in a particular way, *viz.* the cleft sentence constructions with *jn*.

2. Descending vs. ascending nexus types

The "pragmatic" and "syntactic orders" as conceived by LOPRIENO are phenomena that apply to various constructions in a different way. For adverbial sentences, the "pragmatic order" is the rule, the "syntactic order" being restricted to a few examples.⁵ In bimembral nominal sentences with pronominal subject, the "pragmatic order" applies to those with a subject of the first and second persons (*jnk N* type), whereas the "syntactic order" applies to those with a third person subject (*N pw* type). In the obsolescent bimembral nominal sentences with substantival subject, both orders can be found, the "syntactic order" being typical, *e.g.*, in sentences with the subject *rn:f* 'his name (is ...)'. In the suffix conjugations, the order is by definition predicate–subject, corresponding to the "pragmatic order". Among the composite constructions with "expositions" (ALLEN⁶), there is one group to which both orders may apply, *viz.* those with rhematic *sdm:f* and stative (although the "pragmatic order" seems to be here more natural), and another group to which only the "syntactic order" applies, *viz.* those with *sdm-n:f* and the Passive.⁷ It does not seem reasonable to me to generally regard one of the two orders as unmarked and the other one marked. In the adverbial sentence, the "pragmatic order" is certainly unmarked, and so it is in composite constructions with "expositions".⁸ As for the nominal sentence, the *jnk N* type is of the "pragmatic order", whereas the *N pw* type is of the "syntactic order". Which one of the two is unmarked in the nominal sentence in general is equivocal. SCHENKEL, JUNGE, LOPRIENO, *e.g.*, regard the "pragmatic order" as unmarked, whereas I believe to see some evidence for the contrary.⁹

Summing up, I would advocate for regarding both orders as being basic, though probably of a notably different character. For this reason I cannot regard LOPRIENO's terms "syntactic order" and "pragmatic order" as appropriate. In class, I am using (*faute de mieux*) "descending nexus" vs. "ascending nexus" for the orders rheme–theme and theme–rheme, respectively, and I will do so in the following.

⁴ op. cit., 80

⁵ In particular, to sentences with the preposition *n* with pronominal extension as adverbial predicate and an indefinite noun as subject (*i.e.*, the Egyptian expression for 'to have'; note that *n* + extension is not rhematic in these cases, but rather thematic): *jw n-k nḥ* 'you have got life' (Gardiner, Grammar, p. 88.10), [*jn jw*] *n-k jt-j r wʒt* 'does my grain serve you as a way?', and also in some questions of an archaic appearance: *n jʃst jrf tm-k wnm ḥs* 'why will you not eat filth?' CT III, 202i (cf. A. Shisha-Halevy, Coptic Grammatical Categories, 63 n. 3).

⁶ J. P. Allen, Features of Nonverbal Predicates in Old Egyptian, in: Crossroads. Chaos or the Beginning of a New Paradigm, 35.

⁷ H. Satzinger, Anmerkungen zu *jw:f sdm:f*, GM 115, 1990, 99–102.

⁸ However, the composite constructions with predicative *sdm-n:f* and the Passive are exclusively of the "syntactic order" (if we disregard Old Egyptian *jw:f sdm-n:f*).

It is challenging to find out whether there is in fact a difference in meaning between two constructions that obviously differ in the order of their constituents only, *viz.* ascending or descending order. In order to investigate into this, we should consider some of the ambiguous cases mentioned. In a previous study, I have dealt with the order of theme and rheme in the composite constructions with "expositions".¹⁰ The results have, however, remained rather vague.

Diese Reihenfolge Thema—Rhema — die dem Typ des Satzes mit adverbialem Prädikat eigentümlich ist — hat offensichtlich mit dem Bereich "Präsens" zu tun.

In einem vergleichbaren Kontext — dem koptischen Aspektsystem — spricht H. J. POLOTSKY¹¹ davon, daß dieser Prädikationstyp mit dem koptischen (und weiter: ägyptischen) Konzept des Präsens, das Räumlichkeit impliziert, und nicht "Tempus"-Charakter. J. P. ALLEN¹² sagt: "When the subject follows the verb, an action or quality is predicated with respect to the subject: for example, the *sdm·f wbn·f* and the Stative *wbn·(w)* indicate that an action ('rises') or state ('is risen') is true with respect to the subject ('he'). When the subject precedes the predicate, a situation is predicated with respect to the subject: *r^c wbn·f*, *r^c wbn·(w)*, and *r^c hr wbn*, for example, place the subject 'Re' in the situation of 'rising', 'being risen', and 'being in the act of rising', respectively ...". Ich sehe in der Folge Thema—Rhema den Ausdruck einer gewissen konkreten Anschaulichkeit, das Sichtbarwerden, die Vergegenwärtigung eines Geschehens, im Gegensatz zum verstandesmäßigen Referieren.¹³

In the following I argued that each of the constructions that display both the descending and the ascending order has developed from a present tense construction (although, in Middle Egyptian, they represent tenses like Future, Aorist, Present Perfect, etc.). The ascending order, which seems to correspond to some kind of present tense, or progressiveness, is primary. The intrusion of the descending order may be due to the fact that the semantic characteristics of the constructions in question have deviated from the original present tense.

The other important field of syntax that displays an ambiguity of descending and ascending order is the nominal sentence. Its basic form is bimembral, *viz.* ZA or AZ. With substantival theme, these patterns are of very limited use (a typical realisation of ZA is *NN rn·f*, 'he is called NN'). Their domaine is rather the sentence with pronominal theme. In this case, however, the order is not optional, but depends rather on whether the pronoun is "interlocutive" (1st/2nd pers.) or "delocutive" (3rd pers.).¹⁴ LOPRIENO¹⁵ tries to account for this in the frame of his concept by assigning a "high(er) rank on the salience/animacy hierarchy" to the 1st pers. than to the 2nd pers., and again a higher rank

⁹ Cf. H. Satzinger, revue of: Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens. Bibliotheca Orientalis 44, 1987, 621 n. 4.

¹⁰ Op. cit.

¹¹ GM 88, 1985, 22.

¹² J. P. Allen, Tense in Classical Egyptian, in: Essays on Egyptian Grammar (= Yale Egyptological Studies 1), 1986, 9-10.

¹³ H. Satzinger, Anmerkungen zu *jw·f sdm·f*, 100–101

¹⁴ For these terms, see A. Shisha-Halevy's, "Notes on Some Coptic Nominal Sentence Patterns", in Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens (Festschrift Westendorf) I, 175–176.

¹⁵ Loprieno, Typological order, 32 *sub* 4.

to the 2nd pers. than to the 3rd pers., and he regards this as an argument for his concept of topicalization (and on this see above).

Whereas the historical explanation of this Egyptian vexation could perhaps be along such lines, the structure of Middle Egyptian is different. In some prehistorical phase, there has probably been a choice between orders ZA and AZ both for 'I am a ...' and 'he is a ...'. For "pragmatic" reasons, there could have been a tendency to use the AZ order for the one, and the ZA order for the other.¹⁶ In historically attested Egyptian (in particular, in Middle Egyptian and later idioms) there is no such choice. Either 1/2 pers.—then AZ; or 3 pers.—then ZA. "Pragmatics" is not operative any more in the nominal sentence with a pronominal theme. Any notional difference between orders ZA and AZ is neutralized in the sentences with pronominal subject. If we want to discern "pragmatic" differences we have to turn to constructions with substantival theme.

With substantival theme, a trimembral form is normal. Of the three patterns attested, *viz.* AcZ, ZaA, and AZa, the third is clearly of secondary character, as it is derived from ZA by topicalization:¹⁷ *ḥknw pf dd-n-k jnj-tw:f bw pw wr n jw pn* 'that *ḥknw*-oil you spoke of sending, it abounds on this island' (LICHTHEIM) Sh. S. 152; *bꜣ ḥrj-jb tꜣwj:fj Wsjr pw ...* 'as for his twin souls within his two fledglings, they are Osiris ...' (FAULKNER) CT IV 276c–d. Of the other two, ZaA is of the descending order, whereas AcZ is of the ascending order. In accordance with the results of our previous investigation of the adverbial sentence—which are admittedly hypothetical—one might expect the second to have some kind of a particular "present tense" or progressive quality, whereas the first should be devoid of such (and might rather have, on the other hand, something like an "aorist" quality). But I cannot see any trace of convincing evidence for this. The two theories concerning the AcZ pattern that have been discussed recently seem rather to point to the contrary. W. WESTENDORF¹⁸ has suggested that the AcZ pattern is the result of embedding an AZ sentence into a N *pw* sentence: (AZ) *pw* □ A *pw* Z. The meaning that results from such a procedure is thought to be that of "stating a fact" (*konstatieren*), in particular, implying notions like, "es ist der Fall—das bedeutet—es handelt sich darum—es verhält sich folgendermaßen—es gilt (hier und allgemein)—denn es ist ja nun so—daraus folgt—nebenbei gesagt—also—übrigens usw. usw."¹⁹ It goes without saying that such notions are far from any progressiveness or any *Anschaulichkeit* but rather comparable to an "aorist" character. The second suggestion has come from L. DEPUYDT²⁰ who regards the AcZ pattern as the "emphatic" form of the nominal sentence. What has just been said on WESTENDORF'S theory applies

¹⁶ For an inequity of the three persons in Semito-Hamitic in general, and for a tendency of the 1st pers. to have innovative forms, see H. Satzinger, "Structural analysis of the Egyptian independent personal pronoun," in Proceedings of the Fifth International Hamito-Semitic Congress 1987 (Hans G. Mukarovsky, ed.), volume 2 = Beiträge zur Afrikanistik 41, 1991, 121–135.

¹⁷ W. Barta, Das Erstnomen des ABpw-Satzes als topische Konstituente, GM 88, 1985, 7–9.

¹⁸ W. Westendorf, Beiträge zum altägyptischen Nominalsatz. NAWG 81, Nr. 3, Göttingen 1981, 77ff.; id., Der dreigliedrige Nominalsatz Subjekt-pw-Prädikat: konstatierend oder emphatisch? In: GM 109, 1989, 83–94.

¹⁹ GM 109, 1989, 84.

²⁰ L. Depuydt, The Emphatic Nominal Sentence in Egyptian and Coptic, in: Crossroad. Chaos or the Beginning of a New Paradigm (CNI Publications 1, Hg. G. Englund – P. J. Frandsen, 1986), 91–117; also in: Orientalia 56, 1987, 86–88.

equally well to DEPUYDT'S. An "emphatic" utterance (in the Polotskyan sense) is an arguing one, its mode of speaking is the sheer opposite of progressiveness or *Anschaulichkeit*.

One typical notion of the ZaA pattern is qualification. It is often found with (substantivized?) adjectives as rheme, or substantives with an adjectival (qualifying) attribute extension: *jst s3 pw mnħ sr(w)d rn n tpw-^c* 'for he who perpetuates the names of the ancestors is an efficient son' Urk. VII 33,3. Another subcase of the ZaA pattern is the forerunner of the Coptic cleft sentence, viz. Noun + *pw* + Relative Construction: *njsw pw jj* 'he who is summoned comes' Westc. 8, 11. Its derivation from the ZA pattern by backward extension is clear—the dummy subject *pw* is followed by an appositional expression which is rhematic. Agreement in gender can still be found in the Pyramid Texts: *msw Nwt nw h3w ħr·k* 'it is the children of Nut who have gone down upon you' PT 1213a. It is true that many examples seem to be void of *Anschaulichkeit* but rather intend to state a fact; but this is a general characteristic of the nominal sentence.

Summing up, we may state: the notional opposition of descending vs. ascending nexus which seems to be discernible in the composite verbal constructions of the adverbial sentence pattern cannot be ascertained in the nominal sentence. The bimembral nominal sentence with substantival subject is obsolescent and too rare to allow for a judgement. In the bimembral nominal sentence with pronominal subject, the option between descending and ascending nexus is determined by the Person of the subject, rather than by any notional features. In the trimembral patterns of the nominal sentences, no notional difference between the two nexus types that would be comparable to that of the composite verbal constructions can be discerned. In other words: the sequence of constituents (LOPRIENO'S "orders") of nominal sentences cannot (as yet) be correlated with any "pragmatic" phenomena. At any rate, it has nothing to do with topic²¹alization or focalization. It has not been possible to produce any arguments for the question whether any one of the two "orders" is primary, or unmarked.