The Rhematizing Constructions of Egyptian

The way a nominal constituent of an utterance is rhematized in Egyptian is familiar from many other languages, as e.g. from several Western European languages. Heading the sentence, the noun in question appears as predicative, whereas the remaining utterance assumes the form of a relative clause. In English and French the rhematic noun appears in a short sentence of identification consisting of a pronoun (personal or demonstrative, respectively), a form of 'to be' and the noun, it is X, c'est X, which is then extended by an appositional relative clause. In Irish the sentence of identification consists only of the 3rd person Singular form of 'to be' (someone, something, Span. ser) and the noun, in Breton and Welsh—as well as in Berber—just of the noun. In Egyptian it is a nominal sentence (without verb), consisting of the noun and a pronoun (morphologically speaking, it is a demonstrative pronoun; semantically and syntactically, it is the personal pronoun of the nominal sentence of the 3rd person: Middle Egyptian pw, Late Egyptian pšic, Coptic pe): the basic word order of the Egyptian nominal sentence is #predicate, subject#. From Late Egyptian onward, the rhematizing construction is spelled as if the demonstrative pronoun were the definite article before the relative clause, rather than the subject of the fronted noun.²

Rhematizing the agent: Breton me l a lenn ar levr bemdez, Irish is mise l a lean an leabhar gcónaí 'c'est moi qui lit toujours le livre’;² Irish is é l a tháinig sé inné ‘it is he l who came yesterday’; Berber ab nna l a ibnan tig mmi ‘c’est le maçon l qui a construit la maison’; Middle Egyptian jnk pw l mdw n-k ‘It is I who speaks to you’;³ Late Egyptian ntf pš l (j)wn jm ‘h ‘it is he l who stood there’ (looks like ntf l pš(j)wn jm ‘h ‘the one who stood there l is he’); Coptic tou-pistis te l - nta=s-nahm=e ‘it is your (fem.) believe l that has saved you’, ‘c’est ta foi qui t’a sauvée’ (looks similar to the "pseudo-cleft sentence" tou-pistis pe l pe-nta=f-nahm=e ‘what saved you is your believe’).⁶

3 This would be in Middle Egyptian jnk pw l šdd mdšt r-s-nb, in Late Egyptian jnk pš(j) l njt hr ‘s tš-mdšt m-mnt (this looks like the "pseudo-cleft sentence" jnk l pš-njt hr ‘s tš-mdšt m-mnt ‘I am the one who reads the book daily’), and in Coptic anok pe l (e)š m-p-cōme mmēne (looks similar to the "pseudo-cleft sentence" anok pe l pet-šš m-p-cōme mmēne, again ‘I am the one who reads the book daily’).
4 Eloquent Peasant B 1, 20.
5 P. Mayer A 1, 4.
6 STERN, Koptische Grammatik § 424 (p.262), quoted by POLOTSKY, Études de syntaxe copte § 18.
Dio, progressive utterance: Breton me la zo_o lenn ar levr bremañ, Welsh fi sy (yn) darllen yr llyfr nawr, Irish is mise l atá sé ag léamh an leabhair aonís ‘it is I who is reading the book now’; cé hé ... l a bhfuil faobhar ar a ghuith ag réabhadh mo dhóraí dhúnta? ‘Who is he l the sharpness of whose voice is tearing my closed door apart?’

Rhematizing the object: Breton ur levr l a lennan ‘c’est un livre l qu’ il lit’; mr-pr wr pw l shʃjʃ-k ‘(but) it is the high steward you invoke!’ (this continues the jnk pw mdw n-k quoted above); Late Egyptian tʃiʃt ʃ t lnty tw-k hr wʃʃ s ‘Is it the she-ass ... l that you want’.

The verb may be rhematized in the same way. In this case, the verb appears as infinitive, and it is substituted in the following relative clause by ‘to do’: Breton lenn ur levr (‘reading a book’) l a ran (‘what I do’); in Middle Egyptian this construction is found in particular with intransitive verbs of motion, but it is neutralized in respect to rhematization: it has no rhematizing meaning, but is rather a plain narrative construction: sm-t pw (‘it is going’) l jr-nf (‘what he did’), meaning ‘thereupon he went’.

Things are different when it is an adverb rather than a noun that is rhematized. In European languages it is by a ‘that’-clause, rather than a relative clause, that the nuclear sentence of identification is extended in this case. The initial sentence of identification looks the same as with a rhematized noun: a pronoun, the 3rd person Singular form of ‘to be’ and the adverbial expression, ‘it is there’, ‘c’est là’, etc. In French, the ‘that’-clause does not look different from a relative clause with indirect reference: que j’ai vu may be both ‘whom I saw’ and ‘that I saw’. In Breton, e replaces the relative particle a; if the verb (main or auxiliary) is ‘to be’, conjugated emañ ‘(that) he is’ replaces a + }

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7 In living Welsh progressivity is neutralized; mae e (yn) darllen is both ‘he is reading’ and ‘he reads’. The same is true of its Late Egyptian equivalent, sw (hr) šš.
8 The nominal complement of the infinitive is in the genitive case. Cf. the ‘indirect object’ of Coptic which is used under similar conditions, like m-p-čoome above, foot-note 3.
9 With the interrogative pronoun cé, is ‘it is’ is not required.
10 See foot-note 8.
11 The beginning of the ballad “Éamonn an Chnoic”; the answer is, mise Éamonn an Chnoic l a-tá báite fuar fliuich ó shiorshíúl sléibhte is gleananta ‘I am Éamonn an Chnoic who is soaked, cold and wet from endless wanderings through mountains as well as valleys’. See SEÁN O BOYLE, The Irish Song Tradition, Dublin 1976, 33.
12 O. Gardiner 165; see Satzinger, op. cit., 482.
13 Note that living Breton has lost all non-rhematizing constructions and has, by consequence, undergone a high inflation of all rhematizing. If the speaker does neither want to lay stress on the agent nor on any other element of the utterance there is no way out but the verb-rhematizing construction mentioned. GWENC’HLAN LE SCOUÈZEC, Guide de la Bretagne Mystérieuse, Paris 1979), 42–43, gives these examples: debri a ran bara ‘je le mange, ce pain’ (lit. ‘it is eating what I do the bread’); bara a zebran ‘c’est du pain que je mange’; me a zebr bara ‘c’est moi qui mange le pain’.
invariable zo: Breton pegoulz (‘when (is it)?’) le lennez ur levr (‘that you read a book’) — bemdez (‘(is it) always’) le lennen ur levr (‘that I …’); bremañ (‘it is’) now’ l emaon o lenn ul levr (‘that I’m reading a book’). In Irish, there is no difference between relative clauses and ‘that’-clauses: is inné (‘(it) is yesterday’) l a tháinig sé (‘that he came’); cf. is é (‘(it) is he’) l a tháinig sé inné (‘who came yesterday’).— is i mBaile Átha Cliath (‘it is in Dublin’) l a-tá sé anois (‘that he is now’) — ’s i mBaile-na-hinnsi shiar l a-tá mo ghrádh le bliaghain ‘in Ballinahinch in the West I my love is for a year’. In all these languages there is but little morphological difference between utterances with a rhematized noun and utterances with a rhematized adverb. Egyptian is different in this respect. In Egyptian, utterances with a rhematized noun follow the most general pattern of the Nominal Sentence (more precisely, Sentence with Nominal Predicate), Noun (predicate) > Noun (subject). Utterances with a rhematized adverb follow the pattern of the Adverbial Sentence (more precisely, the Sentence with Adverbial Predicate), Noun (subject) > Adverb (predicate). Accordingly, the ‘that’-clause comes first, whereas the rhematized adverb is placed at the end.

Rhematicizing an adverbial complement: the matrix of the Sentence with Adverbial Predicate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Noun (subject / theme)</th>
<th>Adverb (predicate / rheme)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old and Middle</td>
<td>noun clause</td>
<td>adverb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian:</td>
<td>(verbal sentence, substantival)</td>
<td>(including adverb clauses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Egyptian:</td>
<td>“emphatic forms” of verb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coptic:</td>
<td>Second Tenses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Occasionally, not only the theme is a sentence (a noun clause, or ‘that’-clause) but also the rheme; the adverb slot is filled by a clause of circumstance, or adverb clause. A typical case is the Egyptian expression for ‘to find someone / something in this or that state’.

Middle Egyptian “emphatic” forms plus Clause of Circumstance:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preterite:</td>
<td>gm·n·f (preterite nominal) s (jm)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lit.:</td>
<td>that-he-found a-man (there) — is—</td>
<td>while-he-is-standing on the-landing-place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>he found a man (there)</td>
<td>standing on the landing place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aorist:</td>
<td>gmm·f (aorist nominal) jrj-çf</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>he finds his door-keeper</td>
<td>standing with … in his hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[14\] See POLOTSKY, Egyptian Tenses § 14.
\[15\] Eloquent Peasant R 38–39.
\[16\] CT V 184g.
Prospective: \( gm·j(\text{prospective nominal}) S h \)
may I find Orion
\( q h (\text{stative}) h r w ʒ·j \)
standing on my way

Late Egyptian “emphatic” form plus Clause of Circumstance:
\( i·jr·k gm·s(\text{periphrastic “emph.” form}) \)
you found it
\( i·jr·j gm·t·s \)
I found it
\( i·jr·(j) gmj \)
I found
\( mj il h \)
—
like what? —
\( w h (\text{stative}) q h 18 \)
(being) open again
\( jw d j f j w t \ w^c·t s m r t \) \( 19 \)
that he had sent a \( t s m \)-boat to take me
(lit. while he had sent)

Demotic “emphatic” form plus Clause of Circumstance:
\( r·i r f g m \ t^2·r y t h r t \ p^2·\text{wy} \)
he found the upper floor of the house
\( i w s \ s h r, i w s n d h \) \( (20) \)
(it being) swept and (it being) decorated

In Coptic, the Clause of Circumstance is not rhematized in such cases; no “Second Tenses” are used:

Perfect: \( a=i-c n t=f \)
thereupon I found him
\( e=u-e g k a l e i n a=f \) \( (21) \)
being accused

Aorist: \( s a=u-c n t=ou \)
they are (generally) found
\( e-u-č o s e \) \( (22) \)
exalted

Future: \( B f-na-č i m i n n-r ō m i 2 \)
he will find two men
\( e-u-h e m s i \) \( (23) \)
sitting

Conjunctive: \( m e p o s n=se-c n=t e t n \)
lest by any means you may be found
\( e-t e t n-t i \ o u b e \ p-n o u t e \) \( (24) \)
fighting against God

For the sake of completeness, another rhematizing construction has to be mentioned. In nearly all cases it is the agent of a verbal utterance that is rhematized (or focalized) in this case. This rhematized

\( 17 \) CT V 390b = 399i.
\( 18 \) P. BM 10052, 1, 16
\( 19 \) LRL 7, 11
\( 20 \) Setna 5, 15 (JOHNSON, Demotic Verbal System, 107 ex. 175A).
\( 21 \) Acts 23, 29
\( 22 \) Cf. CRUM 820a
\( 23 \) cf. CRUM 820a
\( 24 \) Acts 5, 39
noun comes first, and it is introduced by the same particle \textit{jn} that signals the agent after the infinitive. If, however, the agent is expressed by a personal pronoun, the absolute pronoun is used without any introductory element. — The nucleus of the remaining utterance is either a participle (in Middle Egyptian, perfective and imperfective participles, with past and present meaning, respectively), or an inflected verb form (in Middle Egyptian, the prospective \textit{sdm.f} or \textit{sdmw.f}).

The rhematising constructions show how, in a given language, noun clauses, adjective clauses, and adverb clauses are formed. In Middle Egyptian we find in each case a particular verb form that serves as nucleus of the clause: For several tenses there are particular conjugated forms with nominal, adjectival and adverbial function, respectively. POLOTSKY has coined the term “transpositions” for these categories.

Some Middle Egyptian Tenses and their “transpositions”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenses</th>
<th>independent construction</th>
<th>circumstantial (adverbal) form</th>
<th>nominal (substantival) form</th>
<th>attributive (adjectival) form, fem. sing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Tense, or Preterite\textsuperscript{26}</td>
<td>\textit{jw} \textit{sdm.n} SUBJECT</td>
<td>\textit{sdm.n} SUBJECT</td>
<td>\textit{sdm.n} SUBJECT</td>
<td>\textit{sdmt.n} SUBJECT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>\textit{jw} SUBJECT + Stative</td>
<td>Stative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aorist</td>
<td>\textit{jw} SUBJECT \textit{jr.f},</td>
<td>\textit{jr} SUBJECT</td>
<td>\textit{jr} SUBJECT</td>
<td>\textit{jrrt} SUBJECT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>\textit{jw} \textit{jr} SUBJECT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective</td>
<td>\textit{jrij} SUBJECT</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>\textit{jrij} SUBJECT</td>
<td>\textit{jrtj} SUBJECT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discovery of the rhematizing constructions of Egyptian is due to POLOTSKY, as is the discovery of this two-dimensional Egyptian tense system. This is what at present is often called the Standard Theory of Middle Egyptian (L. DEPUYDT). It comprises not only a category of tenses, but also a


\textsuperscript{26} Upper line: transitives; lower line: intransitives. For this dichotomy, cf. the Perfect Tenses of several other languages, e.g., \textit{il a écouté} vs. \textit{il est allé}; \textit{er hat gehört} vs. \textit{er ist gegangen}; Breton \textit{klevet en deus} vs. \textit{aet eo}; Basque \textit{entzun du} vs. \textit{joan da}; Welsh, however, uses 'to have' (\textit{weli}) for all verbs, as does English.
syntactic—or parts-of-speech—category that distinguishes in each individual tense, in addition to the forms for independent use, adverbial, substantival und adjectival inflected forms, respectively.

Whereas some Egyptologists are amazed by the beauty of this system, others are taken aback by its uniqueness, there being nothing comparable, neither among related nor among non-related languages. As for the neighbouring disciplines, abhorrence has probably prevailed over amazement. Rhematizing constructions are known from several Afroasiatic branches—from Berber, from Chadic (cf. the Second Tenses\textsuperscript{27}), from some Cushitic languages\textsuperscript{28}. But none of these languages has proper relative forms, ‘that’-forms and ‘while’-forms to use them, \textit{inter alia}, in such rhematizing sentences, as well as otherwise.
