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Zero Article, Bare Noun, Absolutive Case

Articles – determinators – a field to which Ariel Shisha-Halevy has made most illuminating contributions on many occasions – obviously an issue in which he takes greatest interest. The following is a modest attempt to shed some light on it by viewing some languages of somewhat differing structure.

After the emergence of the definite and indefinite articles, in Middle Egyptian and Late Egyptian, substantives could appear in three different states: in a definite article phrase (in the widest sense, including demonstrative and possessive articles), in an indefinite article phrase, and in what is used to be called a zero article phrase. In Late Egyptian, the use of a noun without article may be compared with, e.g., the Absolute Status of Akkadian, or, to a lesser extent, with the absolutive case of languages with non-accusative alignment, viz. ergative-absolutive, and nominative-absolutive alignment. Typical uses include predicate, focus, address, quotation, and others. In order to illustrate this, a handful of case studies shall follow here, on pertinent languages that are at hand; without claiming in any way that other languages would be less fit for this goal.

Akkadian, a language with nominative-accusative alignment

Akkadian has three cases:¹ nominative *šarrum*, accusative *šarram*, genitive *šarrim* (summed up as *status rectus*) and, besides, an absolute state: *šar*. The states are clearly on a higher systemic level than the cases: on the top level is the dichotomy of absolute state vs. *status rectus*, and it is only in the latter that we find the category of the cases.

state:	<i>status absolutus</i>	<i>status rectus</i>		
case:	—	nominative	accusative	genitive

The Akkadian absolute state has the form of a “bare noun”,² it shows neither declension nor mimation: *šar* “king”, as opposed to *šarrum*, *šarrim*, *šarram*. It occurs only with simple noun phrases that are not expanded, e.g. by a genitive or an attribute.³ It is regarded to be identical with the third person forms of the stative⁴. Feminine nouns end in *-at*: *šarrat* “queen”; “she is

¹ Cf. SATZINGER, “Afroasiatic Case System”.

² Cf. SATZINGER, “Absolute state and absolutive case”, 65.

³ BUCCELLATI, “Akkadian Stative as a Nominal Sentence”; HUEHNERGAARD, “‘Stative’, Predicative Form, Pseudo-Verb”, 223–224.

⁴ VON SODEN, *Grundriß*, 79 / § 62c; p. 101 / § 77d; BUCCELLATI, “Akkadian Stative as a Nominal Sentence”. .

queen”. Plural and dual forms are mainly attested in the stative: pl. m. *-ū*, f. *-ā*; du. m. *-ā*, f. *-tā*⁵.

As the absolute state of Akkadian does not show any case morphs we may expect it to be used for roles other than those of the arguments of the verb (like nominative and accusative) and the expansion of noun and preposition (like genitive).⁶

- Predicative. In Akkadian this role coincides with the stative: *šar* “(he) is king”.
- Vocative: *šar* “king !”
- Distributive repetitions: *ana māt māt.ma* “for every country”.
- Idiomatic pairs of nouns: *Sexer rabi* “little (and) big”.
- Certain specifications of place or time, etc.
- Numbers⁷: *ištēn* “one”; *šalaš šāt qēmum* “three shut flour”.
- In certain expressions, after prepositions⁸: *ana dār* “for ever”.
- The *nomen regens* is in the absolute form where nominative or accusative is expected: *bēl bītīm* “the lord of the house”, for all syntactic functions. Similarly, Ge‘ez has here the accusative form: *manfasa Heywat* “the breath of life”.

Berber— language(s) with a nominative-absolutive alignment

The majority of the Berber idioms distinguish two cases (the Eastern-most idioms, like Sîwi and Nefūsi, have obviously given up this distinction). Case is marked by prefixes which are thought to be something like ancient definite articles. It can be imagined that originally both article and noun were inflected, though the latter lost this feature later.

- Absolutive (*état libre*):⁹ *ašlhi* “a Berber man”, *tašlhit* “a Berber woman” (Shilha)
- Functions: predicate,¹⁰ focus,¹¹ topic,¹² object,¹³ absolute noun, citation form,¹⁴ rhematic noun in thetic expressions,¹⁵ *nomen regens* in genitival phases,¹⁶ apposition¹⁷

⁵ But see also VON SODEN, “20—90 im Semitischen” for a few non-verbal instances of pl. f. *-ā*, before a suffix pronoun: *-āt-*.

⁶ VON SODEN, *Grundriß*, 79 – § 62.3.

⁷ VON SODEN, “20—90 im Semitischen”.

⁸ MOSCATI et alii, *Comparative Grammar*, 102 / § 12.79.

⁹ Cf. SASSE, “Case”.

¹⁰ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 45–46, exx 4. 15.

¹¹ LOUALI & METTOUCHI “Structures intonatives”, 463 (*D afrum aj n-’šša* “c’est du pain qu’on a mangé”); also cf. METTOUCHI, “Contrastive Focalization”; id., “Focalisation contrastive”.

¹² AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 45–46, exx. 2, 3, 12.

¹³ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 45, exx. 1, 9.

¹⁴ Cf. *afrum* “du pain”, as answer to the question « Qu’est-ce-que c’est ? », pointing to an object (LOUALI & METTOUCHI, “Structures intonatives”, 463).

¹⁵ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 49, exx. 28, 30, 31.

• Nominative (*état d'annexion*): *ušlhi* “a Berber man”, *tšlhit* “a Berber woman” (Shilha)
 Functions: subject (unless topicalised), apposition, genitival extension, complement of preposition.¹⁸

In the verbal complex, word-order is VSO. However, both subject and object are frequently fronted, or less often put in the rear. In all these cases the noun is in the absolutive case. In terms of semantics, this topicalisation has obviously become neutralised, by and large.¹⁹ A fronted object has to be represented in the verbal complex by a personal pronoun, not though, a fronted subject.

The pronominal expression corresponding to the noun in the nominative is on the one hand the suffix pronoun (genitive, prepositional), on the other, the conjugation morphemes of the verb (subject). The pronoun expression corresponding to the noun in the absolutive case is on the one hand the absolute pronoun (predicate, focus, topic, citation form), on the other, the so-called object pronoun, or dependent pronoun (object, rhematic noun inthetic expressions).

Verbal Sentence

Topic	Verb	Subject	Object
Absolutive		Nominative	Absolutive
“The man (- <i>rgaz</i>) saw (<i>izra</i>) the ox (- <i>funas</i>)”:			
	<i>izra</i>	<i>urgaz</i>	<i>afunas</i>
<i>argaz</i> (agent)	<i>izra</i>		<i>afunas</i>
<i>argaz</i> (agent)	<i>izra -t</i> (“it”) <i>ufunas</i> (apposition!)		
<i>afunas</i> (patient)	<i>izra -t</i> (“it”)	<i>urgaz</i>	
“He saw the ox”			
	<i>izra</i>		<i>afunas</i>
	<i>izra -t</i> (“it”) <i>ufunas</i> (apposition!)		
<i>afunas</i>	<i>izra -t</i> (“it”)		
“He saw it”			
	<i>izra -t</i>		

¹⁶ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 45 ex. 5 (*afus wwərgaz* (= *nw...*) ‘the hand of the man’)

¹⁷ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 48–49, exx. 22, 23, 25, 26.

¹⁸ LIPÍŃSKI, *Semitic Languages*, 460, § 48.2 quotes, *yəhwa yar u-βrið* “he went down to the road”; *yəwθa w-ma-s s u-kššud* “he struck his brother with a stick”.

¹⁹ METTOUCHI, “Word Order”.

The Adverbial Sentence (sentence with adverbial predicate) has the order #noun — adverb#; if, however, the nominal member is indetermined and hence rhematic, rather than thematic, the order is inverted: #adverb — noun#. In the first case the noun is in the absolutive case, just like the topicalised subject of a verb; in the second case the indefinite noun is in the nominative, just like the subject following on a verb.

Noun (determined) Absolutive	Adverb		
<i>arrau</i> children	<i>gg-uxam</i> (nominative) in-house		“The children are in the house” (Schilh) ²⁰

	Adverb	Noun (indetermined) Nominative	
	<i>rfi</i> to-me	<i>ufiul</i> donkey	“I have a donkey” (Kabylye) ²¹

Nominal Sentence and Cleft Sentence²²

Dialectal variation: in some idioms, a tripartite construction is possible, in which an element *d* precedes the rheme.

Bipartite

Theme Absolutive	Rheme Absolutive		
<i>nəkk</i> I	<i>amellal</i> white		“I am white”
<i>ism-ns</i> name–his	<i>Muha</i> M.		“his name is Muha” ²³

²⁰ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 45, ex. 10. Corrected after SASSE “Case”, 121.

²¹ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 47, ex. 17.

²² METTOUCHI, “Contrastive Focalization”; id., “Focalisation contrastive”.

²³ WOLFF, “Berber”, 183.

Tripartite:

Copula	Rheme Absolutive	Theme Nominative	
<i>d</i>	<i>baba-s</i> father-his	<i>urgaz nni</i> man here	“The man here is his father” ²⁴
<i>d</i> <i>ur id</i> NEG COP	<i>netta</i> 3ms.ABS <i>nekk</i> 1cs.ABS	<i>ay-t iuten</i> REL-3ms.DEP beat:3ms	It is he who beat him, it is not me. ²⁵

Theme Absolutive	Copula	Rheme Absolutive	
<i>ntta</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>aqbaili</i>	he is a Qabyle ²⁶
<i>Muḥnd</i>	<i>ḍ</i>	<i>amqqrān</i>	Muhammad is great ²⁷
<i>argaz-aggi</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>amdakl-iu</i>	this man is my friend ²⁸

Thetic expressions

Thetic particle	Noun Absolutive	Apposition Nominative	
<i>hak</i> here	<i>argaz</i> man		“Here is the man” (Tamazight) ²⁹
<i>aql</i> here	<i>-iyi</i> 1s.DEP		Here I am
<i>ha</i> here	<i>-t</i> 3ms.DEP	<i>wəqšiš</i> boy	“Here is a boy” (Kabyle) ³⁰

East Cushitic— languages with a nominative-absolutive alignment

The case system of East Cushitic is similar to that of Berber.³¹ Cushitic nouns mark the cases by endings, as in Semitic; basically *-a for the absolutive, *-u/-i for the nominative and/or genitive. Thus, e.g., in Saho:

²⁴ METTOUCHI, “Discourse-Configurationality”, 89, ex. 10.

²⁵ <http://elguanche.net/tamazgha/vocabulariot6.htm>.

²⁶ WOLFF, “Berber”, 183.

²⁷ LIPÍŃSKI, *Semitic Languages*, 273, § 33.5.

²⁸ WOLFF, “Berber”, 183.

²⁹ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 50, ex. 35.

³⁰ AIKHENVALD, “Split Ergativity”, 45, ex. 7.

“• The *absolutive* is the unmarked case, used for the direct object of a verb, as citation form, and when a noun is used as a predicate followed by the copula *kinni* “to be” or by a verb like *ekke* “to be, to become, to happen”, etc., e.g., *xiyawto uble* “I saw a man”, *yemeete tii xiyawto kinni* “the one who came is a man”...”.³²

“• The *nominative* is used for the subject of the clause. It has a particular form for the masculine nouns ending with *-a*, *-e*, and *-o* which take *-i*: e.g., *xiyawti yi yuble* “the man saw me” ...”.³³

Hence, the characteristic uses of the absolutive case in Cushitic and Berber are the following.

- The citation form.
- The address (“vocative”; partly also in Semitic).
- Nominal predicates and predicative nouns.
- The focalised noun (no matter what its function is in the basic clause).
- The adverbial case (also in Semitic).
- The *nomen regens* of a genitive construction: Kabyle *a-fus wwərgaz* (= *n-wərgaz*) “the hand of the man”; cf. Ge‘ez: *manfas-a heywat* “the breath of life”. In Akkadian, the *nomen regens* is in the absolute form where nominative or accusative is expected, see above.

The personal pronoun in French and the Celtic languages

As French and the Brythonic languages do not have morphological cases, and as in Irish nominative and accusative have merged, the morphosyntax of the substantive is not conclusive in respect to existence or non-existence of an absolutive case. However, there is an absolute pronoun that is derived from, or identical with, the accusative form. Similar usage is also found in English.

French *c'est moi qui lit le livre* — Breton *me a lenn ar levr* — Welsh *fi sy 'n darllen yr llyfr* (progressive construction, “on reading”) — Irish *is mise a lean an leabhar* (*is* isthetic; *mi-* is augmented by a 3rd person suffix pronoun, *-se*) — English *it is me who reads the book*.

Basque (Euskara), a language with ergative-absolutive alignment

“... Noun Phrases in Euskara present a strong tendency to be headed by an overt Determiner; that is, there are no instances of ‘bare plurals’ and hardly any instances of ‘bare nouns’...”

(LAKA *Brief Grammar* §6). Substantives and adjectives are regularly “determined”³⁴, viz.

- by the “determiner” *-a*, plural *-ak*: *gizona* “the/a man” *gizonak* “(the) men”,

³¹ SATZINGER, “Afroasiatic Case System”.

³² VERGARI & VERGARI, *Saho-English-Italian Dictionary*, 21.

³³ *Ib.*.

³⁴ LAKA, in http://www.nabasque.org/Pages/Euskara_Laka.htm.

- by one of the demonstratives: *gizon hau* “this man”, *gizon hori* “that man”, *gizon hura* “that man yonder”; *gizon hauek* “these men”, *gizon horiek* “those men”, *gizon haiek* “those men yonder”,
- by a number: *txori bat* (1) “one bird”, (2) “a bird”; *txori bi* “two birds”; *hiru txori* “three birds” (definite number phrases have numeral plus determiner: *hiru txoriak* “the three birds”), or
- by an indefinite pronoun: *zombait lagun* “some companions”, *zer gizon da* “what man is it?”.

All these elements undergo declension:

	Bare noun	Determiner		Dem., e.g. “this”		Numeral, e.g. “three”
		sing.	plur.	sing.	plur.	
Abs.	<i>gizon</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-ak</i>	<i>hau</i>	<i>hauek</i>	<i>hiru</i>
Erg.	<i>gizonek</i>	<i>-ak</i>	<i>-ek</i>	<i>honek</i>	<i>hauek</i>	<i>hirurek</i> ³⁵
Dat.	<i>gizoni</i>	<i>-ari</i> ³⁶	<i>-ei</i>	<i>honi</i>	<i>hauei</i>	<i>hiruri</i> ³⁵
Gen.	<i>gizonen</i>	<i>-aren</i> ³⁶	<i>-en</i>	<i>honen</i>	<i>hauen</i>	<i>hiruren</i> ³⁵

etc. (all in all, some 14 cases)

With one exception, all determiners combine with the bare noun: *gizon hau* “this man”, *gizon hauek* “these men”, *gizon gazte horiek* “those young men”; *lau etxe zahar* “four (l.) old (z.) houses”; *bide honetatik* (ablative case) “by this road”, *arrazoi hargatik* (ablative case) “for that reason”; the exception is the determined numeral phrase in which the numeral combines with the determined noun: *lau etxe zaharrak* “the four old houses”; here, the substantive is probably to be seen as in apposition.

Normally, the absolutive case covers the functions of object and, in ergative languages, subject (intransitive noun). In Basque, the uses of the absolutive case exceed those of subject (intransitive) and object by far (examples are from a grammar of Navarro-Labourdan³⁷):

Absolutive case, with determiner:

- Arguments of verb, ergative-absolutive alignment

Sujet intrans.: *gizona ethorri da* « l’homme est venu ! »

Compl. direct [= object]: *haurra ikusi dut* « j’ai vu l’enfant »

- Absolute and predicative uses

³⁵ The second *-r-* is epenthetic.

³⁶ The *-r-* is epenthetic.

³⁷ LAFITTE, *Grammaire basque* § 847.

Attribut [= predicative noun]: *ogia ona da* « le pain est bon (*on*) », *hortzak azkarrak dituzte* « ils sont les dents (*h.*) fortes (*a.*) », *on da jakitea* « il est bon (*on*) de savoir »

Désignation: *oharpina* « avertissement », *othoitzak* « prières » [head lines of announcements]

Vocatif: *zatho, haurra* « venez, enfant », *agur, Jaunak* « bonjour, messieurs » [address]

Exclamatif: *gaicho haurra* « le pauvre enfant ! », *agur* « salu ! »

Nom. absolu: *nigarra begian heldu ziren* « ils venaient les larmes (*n.*) aux yeux (*begi*) », *eskuak sakelan* « les mains aux poches »

• Absolute=adverbial uses

Durée: *bi asti ari izan da* « il est travaillé deux semaines (*asti*) »

Prix: : *ehun libera pagatu dut* « je l'ai payé cent francs »

Différence: *lau urthe lehenago* « quatre ans auparavant », *sei metra gorago* « six mètres plus haut », *puska ederrago* « bien plus beau » [lit.: “a bit (*puska*) nicer”]

Mesures: *hiru zehe luze* « long de trois empan », *lau libera pisu* « du poids de quatre livres »

Sens partitif: *bada ura* “there is water” [but *bada ur* “the water is there” (though something else is lacking)]

A b s o l u t i v e c a s e , w i t h o u t d e t e r m i n e r

• Bahuvrihi or exocentric compounds, or similar:

Compl. de nom *odol-chorta* « goutte (*chorta*) de sang (*odol*) » [cf. Ger. *Blutstropfen*]

Compl. d'adj. *aita iduria* « semblable (*i.*) à son père (*aita*) »; *diru gore* « affamé (*gore*) d'argent (*diru*) » [cf. Ger. *geldgierig*]

In contradistinction to languages with nominative-absolutive case alignment, like Berber and many Cushitic languages, the absolutive case of Basque encompasses also the functions of the subject of intransitive verbs — the essence of the ergative system. The functions of the absolutive case are thus: object, adverbialis, quotation form, address, predicate, focus, subject of intransitive verbs

Old Nubian, a language with nominative-accusative alignment

Old Nubian³⁸ has a subject case, the nominative in *-(i)l*, for main sentences; an object case, the accusative in *-k*; a form in *-u* for attributive nouns; and a genitive in *-(i)n*. Furthermore, it has a predicative state (its morphological characteristic is an ending *-a*) which is found with both verbs and nouns; obviously, even with the accusative (*-k.a*) and the genitive (*-n.a*).

³⁸ See BROWNE, *Old Nubian Grammar*, 24–36; cf. SATZINGER, “Old Nubian”.

	Part clause	Main sentence = predicative status
Verbal predicate	-0	-a
Nominal predicate	-0, plur. <i>-gu</i>	-a , plur. -a.gue
Accusative: object	<i>-k</i> , plur. <i>-gu.k</i>	-k.a , plur. -gu.k.a
Genitive (preceding its referent)	<i>-n</i> , plur. <i>-gu.n</i> Also subject of verbs	-n.a , plur. -gu.n.a
Nominative: subject of verbs	—	-l
P r e s e n t (no tense marker)		
Nom. subject	N-n V- <i>l</i> (< <i>r</i>)	N- <i>l</i> V- <i>r.a</i>
Pron. subject,		
1s	<i>ai</i> V- <i>iri</i>	<i>ai</i> V- <i>ire</i> (< <i>ir.i+a</i>)
2s	<i>ir</i> V- <i>in</i> (< <i>ir.n</i>)	<i>ir</i> V- <i>ina</i> (< <i>ir.n+a</i>)
3s	<i>tar</i> V- <i>in</i>	<i>tar</i> V- <i>ina</i>
1p.incl	<i>er</i> V- <i>iru</i>	<i>er</i> V- <i>iro</i> (< <i>ir.u+a</i>)
1p.excl	<i>u</i> V- <i>iru</i>	<i>u</i> V- <i>iro</i>
2p	<i>ur</i> V- <i>iru</i>	<i>ur</i> V- <i>iro</i>
3p	<i>ter</i> V- <i>iran</i>	<i>ter</i> V- <i>irana</i>
P r e t e r i t e I (marker <i>-a-</i>)		
Nom. subject	N-n V- <i>ol</i> (< <i>ar</i>)	N- <i>l</i> V- <i>ar.a</i>
Pron. subject,		
1s	<i>ai</i> V- <i>ari</i>	<i>ai</i> V- <i>are</i> (< <i>ari+a</i>)
2s	<i>ir</i> V- <i>on</i> (< <i>ar+n</i>)	<i>ir</i> V- <i>ona</i> (< <i>-ar.n+a</i>)
3s	<i>tar</i> V- <i>on</i>	<i>tar</i> V- <i>ina</i>
1p.incl	<i>er</i> V- <i>aru</i>	<i>er</i> V- <i>aro</i> (< <i>aru+a</i>)
1p.excl	<i>u</i> V- <i>aru</i>	<i>u</i> V- <i>aro</i>
2p	<i>ur</i> V- <i>aru</i>	<i>ur</i> V- <i>aro</i>
3p	<i>ter</i> V- <i>uan</i>	<i>ter</i> V- <i>uana</i>
P r e t e r i t e II (marker <i>-is-</i>)		
Nom. subject	N-n V- <i>isil</i> (< ... <i>ir</i>)	N- <i>l</i> V- <i>is.a</i> (< <i>isra</i>)
Pron. subject,		
1s	<i>ai</i> V- <i>isi</i>	<i>ai</i> V- <i>ise</i> (< <i>isi+a</i>)
2s	<i>ir</i> V- <i>isin</i> (< <i>is+n</i>)	<i>ir</i> V- <i>is(i)na</i>
3s	<i>tar</i> V- <i>isin</i>	<i>tar</i> V- <i>is(i)na</i>

1p.incl	<i>er V-isu</i>	<i>er V-iso (< isu+a)</i>
1p.excl	<i>u V-isu</i>	<i>u V-iso</i>
2p	<i>ur V-isu</i>	<i>ur V-iso</i>
3p	<i>ter V-isana</i>	<i>ter V-isana</i>
F u t u r e (marker <i>-ar-</i> , var. <i>-d-</i>)		
Nom. subject	N-n V- <i>dil</i> (< ... <i>r</i>)	N-l V- <i>arr.a</i>
Pron. subject,		
1s	<i>ai V-arri</i>	<i>ai V-arre (< arri+a)</i>
2s	<i>ir V-an (< ar+n)</i>	<i>ir V-anna</i>
3s	<i>tar V-an</i>	<i>tar V-anna</i>
1p.incl	<i>er V-arru</i>	<i>er V-arro (< arru+a)</i>
1p.excl	<i>u V-arru</i>	<i>u V-arro</i>
2p	<i>ur V-arru</i>	<i>ur V-arro</i>
3p	<i>ter V-arran</i>	<i>ter V-arrana</i>

The predicative phrase, whether with verbal or with nominal nucleus, is in the predicative status. This is marked on the nucleus (*-a*), on the object of the verb (*-k-a*), and on the genitive (*-n-a*); probably also on the postposition *-lo*, which appears as *-la*.

- A headline:³⁹

Nokkor+a khristos.in martyros.u Niss.u mēna.n+a au-s+a-lō
 miracle-ABS Christ-GEN Martyr-ATTR holy-ATTR Mena-GEN-ABS do-PAST-ABS-THET

“A miracle which Mena, the holy martyr of Christ, performed.”

The nucleus of the phrase is the noun *Nokkor.a*, “a miracle”, perhaps the predicate to the demonstrative element *-lō*. The nucleus of the attributive clause is the preterite II-converb *au.s.a*, in the predicative state by virtue of the governing *Nokkor.a*. The subject of the part clause (here in attributive function) is in the genitive (*-n*); it shares the predicate status with the converb *au.s.a* on which it depends: *mēna.n.a*.

- An address, one of the areas where the predicative status is applied:⁴⁰

on-tak-rague-ke
 love-PASS-SUBJ-PLUR.ABS-ADDR

“Beloved!”

- A simple narrative verbal sentence:⁴¹

³⁹ BROWNE, *Saint Menas*, 5. 22.

⁴⁰ BROWNE, *Saint Mena*, 5. 23.

⁴¹ BROWNE, *Saint Mena*, 5. 23–5.

itt.u *wel-lo* *dipp.u* *wel-l+a* *du-ar+a* *aleksandre.n* *šik.gu-l+a*.
 woman-ATTR one-THET town-ATTRone-in-ABS dwell-PAST-ABS alexandra-GEN district-in-ABS
 A woman lived in a village in the district⁴² of Alexandria.

The verbal predicate is the non-conjugated preterite I-form (Browne's *verbid*) *du.ar.a*, to a subject *itt.u wel.lo*. *-lo* is probably a phonetic merger of the nominative *-l* and the thetic/demonstrative element *-lo* (which may be compared with the *pw > pAy > pe* of Egyptian/ Coptic), often found, e.g., in the opening of a narration (just as *pw > pAy > pe* in Egyptian/ Coptic). The subject phrase is the only element of the sentence that is not in the predicative status, all others are: the locative expression *dipp.u wel.la* (probably *-lo* "in" + *a*), and the postposed locative expression *aleksandre.n šik.gu.la* (again, *-lo* "in" + *a*).

tar-on ... *un.ar+a* *men.n+a-lō* *Na-k-ende* *as-k-ende*.
 he/she/it-and ...give birth-PAST-AJNC not be-PRES-ABS-TOP son-OB J-ABS?-NEG daughter-OBJ-ABS?-NEG
 "And she ... could not bear either son or daughter (*or*, And it was not the case that ...)."

In the *lo* matrix, the nucleus of the verbal complex is in the predicative status: *men.n+a-lō*.⁴³ What distinguishes the predicative state of Old Nubian from the absolute case of Berber and East Cushitic is the fact that the system disposes of an accusative case; in fact, the predicative state ranges above the accusative and genitive. Insofar, Old Nubian may be compared with Akkadian, although there are fundamental differences. In particular, the absolute state of Old Nubian covers also the verbal system.

Egyptian (1): Late Egyptian

Egyptian does not have morphological cases. Late Egyptian disposes of a definite and an indefinite article, insofar it may be adduced here. The bare noun, without any article, or article equivalent, is the form of the noun in the absolute state. A noun is found in the absolute state (as a bare noun) when used as a predicate, or as a rheme, with partitive meaning, in indications of time, and in idiomatic expressions.

1) Predicative expressions of qualification or categorisation, viz.

- the non-definite predicate in nominal sentences (*hsbd šnwꜥs* "her hair is lapis lazuli"⁴⁴; *jtrw ʕꜣ tꜣyꜥf-st sdr* "its sleeping place is a big river"⁴⁵;

⁴² Cf. SANTOS, "reconstruction of the Greek text".

⁴³ From this, a *verbid* depends that is also in the predicative status: *un.ar+a*. The object of this transitive verb, two substantives in parallel, is in tail position; most probably, these nouns are in the absolute status too, by virtue of their extraposition rather than by being the object of a predicative verb; however, the morpheme *-a* merged with the initial vowel of the postposition *-ende*.

⁴⁴ GROLL, *Non-verbal Sentence Patterns*, 25 ex. 79 (The Chester Beatty Love songs, Pap. I, verso C, 1, 4).

- a rhematised subject in a nominal sentence⁴⁶ (*jw p3yꜣf-pr hftj n p3-dmj* “since his house is (like) an enemy for the (whole) settlement”⁴⁷; also if the use of the subject as rheme is grammaticalised (i.e., in the case of a pronominal theme of the 1st/2nd person]: *ntk j3w šš* “you are a silly old man”⁴⁸;

- nouns that are governed by the *m* of predication; in particular, when indicating a profession ((*i.*)*wn m hry-pdt* “who was (then) a troop captain”⁴⁹), or a family relation (*wnꜣj m hmt m-dj wꜣ-mnjw jhw* “I was the wife of a cowherd” (lit. “I was as wife with a cowherd”

2) Partitive expressions,

- indefinite quantities, such as *jwꜣf (hr) djt nꜣj ꜣkw hnkt* “and he gave me bread and beer” (*du pain, de la bière*)⁵¹; or expressions of kind, type, or form, like *jh m 3tp* “what kind of load?”;

- subject and object expressions in negative sentences, unless of definite meaning.

Subject: *mn m-djꜣj rmt* “I have not got any people”⁵² (positive counterpart: *wn m-djꜣj wꜣ-rmt* “I have got a man”); object: *b-pyꜣn sdm nkt* “we haven’t heard anything”⁵³; *m dy br m-djꜣf r p3-t3 n Kmt* “don’t let a boat of his own (go) to Egypt”⁵⁴.

3) Indications of time: *hrw* “(on) the day” (but *p3-hrw* “this day”, *m p3-hrw* “today”); *dw3*, *dw3yt* “(in) the morning”; *dw3* “morrow”, “tomorrow”; *grh* “(in) the night” (but *p3-grh* “tonight”); etc.

4) In idiomatic expressions, viz.

- in adverbial expressions with an abstract noun expanding the preposition *m*, such as *m m3ꜣt* “in truth”, “truly”; *m ꜣd3* “in falsehood”, “wrongly”;

- in attributive specifications built upon the genitival *n*, such as *hnww n nbw hd hsmn* “vessels of gold, silver, and bronze”, *p3-hnw n wdḥ* “the offering vessel”, *wšbt n mwt* “capital charge”;

- when expanding a verb, hereby forming a new lexeme;

sdm hrw “to hear someone speaking” (lit. “to hear a voice”)

sdm mdt “to have command of (a language)” (lit. “to hear a speech”)

⁴⁵ GROLL, *Non-verbal Sentence Patterns*, 24, ex. 78 (Blinding of Truth, 9, 3 – 9, 5).

⁴⁶ The natural sequence of elements is *predicate – subject* in the nominal sentence. However, the subject may be rhematized for particular notional or stylistic effects, which yields a sequence *theme – rheme*.

⁴⁷ GROLL, *Non-verbal Sentence Patterns*, 22, ex. 70 (Amenemope, VIII, 5).

⁴⁸ ČERNÝ, & GROLL, *Late Egyptian Grammar*, 521, ex. 1473 (BM 10052, 10, 8).

⁴⁹ ČERNÝ, & GROLL, *Late Egyptian Grammar*, 71, ex. 213 (BM 10052, 7, 11).

⁵⁰ GARDINER, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, 45, 2 (Horus & Seth 6, 8–9).

⁵¹ ČERNÝ, & GROLL, *Late Egyptian Grammar*, 72, ex. 218 (LRL, 7, 14).

⁵² GROLL, *The Negative Verbal System*, 22, ex. 48 (LEM, 6, 7).

⁵³ ČERNÝ, *Ostraca hiératiques*, pl. 44* (O. Cairo CGC 25556, 6–7).

⁵⁴ GROLL, *The Negative Verbal System*, 16, ex. 29 (Wenamun 2, 63–64).

dj ht m “to kindle, to ignite” (lit. “to put fire into”)

Egyptian (2): Coptic

Like Late Egyptian, Coptic does not have morphological cases. Like Late Egyptian, it disposes of a definite and an indefinite article. A noun may be definite or indefinite, or it may be a “bare noun”.

The articles are excluded⁵⁵

1) after the *n-* of the attributive construction: *p-rōme n-sabe* “the wise man”; *ou-rōme n-sabe* “a wise man”; *p-nok^h n-rōme* “the old/great man”; *hn aš n-he* “in what manner?”; *pšomnt nhoou* “the three days” (sing.);

2) after *n-* in predications of essence and in related usages: *fo nsabé* “he is wise”; *ašōpe nan mpaidagōgos* “it became a schoolmaster for us” Gal 3:24; *če aīkō mmok neiōt n-...* “I made you father of...” Ro 4:17; similarly,

3) after *hōs*: *hōs šēre šēm* “as a little child” Lc 18:17;

4) when being part of a composite verb, after auxiliary verbs: *r-boēthos* “to help”; *či-šipe* “to be ashamed”; *etc.*;

5) when being part of a composite adjective, after the “conjunct participles”: *mai-rōme* “philanthropic”; *fai-beké* “hireling”; *etc.*

In all these cases, and perhaps in some further, the bare noun is used, rather than the indefinite article expanded by a noun. “In explaining this, we should probably not speak of *definiteness being excluded*, or even of *indefiniteness being compulsory*, but rather of *definiteness being neutralised*. In none of these cases, definiteness is relevant, and Coptic is here economic in admitting neither the definite nor the indefinite article, but rather uses zero determination.”⁵⁶

Thus, determination by means of the indefinite article occurs only when definiteness is truly optional in both aspects involved: that is, with nouns that may be both definite and indefinite (though not with cardinal numbers, hence with substantives only), and this only in those syntactic situations that allow both definite and indefinite nouns.

There is, however, an important phenomenon that is not accounted for by this rule. Even where definiteness is optional in the above sense, the indefinite article is not used if the statement is negative. The opposition is here

p-rōme vs. *rōme*, plur. *n-rōme* vs. *rōme*,

rather than *p-rōme* vs. *ou-rōme*, plur. *n-rōme* vs. *hen-rōme*. This is not a case of definiteness

⁵⁵ Cf. TILL, *Koptische Grammatik* § 103-108; SATZINGER, “On definiteness”.

⁵⁶ SATZINGER, “On definiteness”.

being neutralised, as was discerned above in certain syntactic environments, since both definite and indefinite noun syntagmata are possible in negative statements (e.g., *mpe-p-rōme sōtm* vs. *mpe-rōme sōtm*). Here, avoidance of the indefinite article is obviously conditioned by the logical structure of such sentences. Negativity implies that the statement concerns, not individual objects, but rather a class of objects. In Coptic, the appropriate expression of this is obviously the bare noun, rather than the indefinite article expanded by the noun.

On reconsidering the cases where definiteness is neutralised by syntactic conditions, we will find that the same explanation applies to them. In every particular condition it is to a class of objects that reference is made, rather than to an individual object: *prōme nsabé* “the man of the class of the clever”; *fo nsabé* “he is of the class of the clever”, etc. Hence, the case described may be compared with the Partitive Case category of languages that dispose of such. Is it a case of “zero article”, or of a “bare noun”⁵⁷ ?

An important point of disagreement between Late Egyptian and Coptic is the nominal predicate. The older stage of the language has the bare noun for the indefinite predicate (such as many languages have here bare noun or absolutive case) whereas the later stage has here the indefinite article phrase: *neī-rōme hen-ioudāi ne* “these men are Jews” Acts 16:20⁵⁸. In Late Egyptian, the “noun with zero article” is a “bare noun”; a noun phrase in the precise sense, and not part of an article phrase. Its role may be compared with that of an absolute state (in the sense of Akkadian grammar), or an absolutive case (as that of Berber and Cushitic).

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⁵⁷ SHISHA-HALEVY, *Topics*, 448 says in respect to a pertinent case (attribution of a noun/ adjective by means of *n-*), “... it is arguable that we do not have a *zero* here at all, and *n-* is a true attribute marker prefixed to the bare lexeme...”.

⁵⁸ LAYTON, *Coptic Grammar* § 272.

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