

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem  
Bölcsészettudományi Kar

# DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

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## **Coptic noun phrases**

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## Kopt főnévi szerkezetek

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Budapest 2012

## Tézisek

## **Main topics and methodological considerations**

The dissertation is concerned with the noun phrase structure in Coptic with a special concentration on definiteness and possessive constructions as well as on attributive patterns insofar as these latter are related to the possessives in form. Only phenomena with relevant features either from a dialectal or from a diachronic perspective are discussed. The focus is on the *inner* constructional properties of the Coptic noun phrase rather than on how it appears in the sentence structure.

The thesis has both a diachronic and a comparative dialectological perspective, and this duality is present throughout the chapters. The methods, however, are accurately kept apart: while a diachronic study may compare data from different stages, spanning over centuries or even millennia, to get as close as possible to the understanding of language change, the study of a synchronic grammar must strictly concentrate on the system of oppositions which is in operation in the actual use of the language, without considering where the various patterns come from.

The traditional method of distinguishing dialects primarily by means of orthographical and phonological criteria is inadequate, and must be supplemented by morpho-syntactical criteria. The thesis intends to contribute to this issue.

Comparing dialects without considering time intervals and the possible, what is more very probable, influence of one dialect to the other (in terms of socio-linguistics) is methodologically mistaken and must be revised. Whether it is about a structural analysis of a synchronic system, or a comparison of certain linguistic phenomena in various language varieties, one should restrict the time-interval and the range of variants (dialects) to be investigated. In this dissertation, the early Coptic varieties will be treated only. An effort has been made to take the Sahidic examples from the same corpus: the early version of the *Gospel of John* in the well-preserved P. Palau Ribes Inv. 183. Considering accidental occurrences of certain linguistic phenomena, citing examples from other authors' works turned out to be inevitable. The research is almost entirely confined to Biblical texts; the manuscripts I used are listed in *table 4* in section 1.4.

The study is linguistic-oriented and is concerned neither with text criticism, nor with the relation between the manuscripts in terms of literary tradition or Bible translation. The influence of translation in the appearance of these texts cannot be denied but it hardly affects the linguistic phenomena investigated in this thesis.

The definition of the Coptic language and its cultural, historical and diachronic setting are provided in the introductory chapter, with a more extended discussion about various aspects of the Greek-Egyptian contact and the possible effects of the translated nature of the texts. It is followed by a short presentation of the various Coptic dialects, and a summary of the current state of research.

## **Linguistic background, basic concepts and construction types**

The basic formal properties of the Coptic nominal expressions are introduced as well as the linguistic concepts and theoretical assumptions which are required for a good understanding

of the rest of the thesis. The morphological description is followed by a deeper study concerning the nature of the remnant morphological plural marking. In accordance with the evidence provided by Greek nouns combined with Egyptian plural marking, the suffix is claimed to be still a productive inflectional strategy in Pre-Coptic, when these Greek loanwords were eventually borrowed.

The old-standing dilemma of categorical classification is also addressed with respect to Coptic adjectives on the one hand, and verbs on the other. Not every item associated to a category display all the syntactic or semantic properties ascribed to their class, that is to say, some members of the class may be ‘better’ or more prototypical than others, and the unstable elements may even change category in time. Furthermore, the boundaries between categories are usually fuzzy and some properties of different categories may converge. Categories used in this thesis will be determined by morphosyntactic distributional criteria.

Although the overall nominal character of native Coptic ‘adjectives’ has been observed, my claim is that, contrary to the certain opinions, there *are* syntactic and even morpho-syntactic strategies for separating the class of adjectives, or at least a subclass of nouns that are typically used as modifiers. These have no inherent grammatical gender and can appear in both mediated and inverted constructions without giving up their modifier function (the so called placement opposition problem). Whether a subset of nouns that can still be distinguished from ordinary substantives exists is of significance in reconstructing the process of grammaticalization of attributive constructions, which is the main topic of Chapter 5.

There is no point in describing Coptic verbs as infinitives in a language where one can no longer detect a true finite vs. non-finite opposition from a morphological point of view. Verbs must be demarcated by distributional rules, as well. Studying the integration strategies of loan verbs into Coptic may also provide us with clues as to how *nominal* the verbal slot can be considered within the Coptic grammatical system. The claim according to which Copto-Greek verbs have the morphological structure of nouns and, as a consequence, bear a purely nominal syntax, is debated. In Bohairic, loan verbs were always treated syntactically as nouns indeed and an auxiliary was needed to accommodate them in all the possible environments and sentence patterns. This was not the case, however, in Sahidic, which proves to be consistent in not applying a light verb. The assumed imperative form of the adopted model verb is supported by phonological facts and typological observations, and it can be derived from the morpho-syntactic properties of Coptic considering that the structure of the borrowing language is more likely to determine how loan verbs are integrated. Further dialects have also been examined to see the distribution of integration strategies, and I argued that some kind of correlation may be observed between the input forms and the accommodation strategies. This correlation is, however, unidirectional, i.e. if loan verbs are perceived as nominal elements (e.g. as infinitives in the donor language), the direct insertion strategy is not available for them to function as Coptic verbs. Nevertheless, it does not mean that a more verb-like element rejects a light verb strategy when borrowing takes place. Based on an empirical research, four language varieties have been distinguished in Coptic (between the 3rd and 6th century). Variety 1 adopts the imperative-like form with a ‘direct insertion’ strategy (the so called Sahidic strategy). In variety 2 the input form is clearly an infinitive and a light verb is needed to accommodate the new lexical element (the Bohairic strategy). Variety 3 is similar to variety 2 but allows more than one accommodation strategy at the same time. Variety 4 is remarkable for its consistency in the input form: it mixes the strategies (to various extent in the individual dialects), but always adopts the imperative form. Reconstructing a possible diachronic change on the basis of interdialectal variation must be handled with caution. The

secondary nature of imperative-like forms cannot be justified. The mixed varieties may just as well be the result of interdialectal borrowing and synchronic interferences between standard varieties and local idioms.

A noun may be (and usually is) accompanied by constituents of various nature and category to form a more complex nominal construction. It is worth, however, making a distinction between various adnominal modifiers and determiners, since these latter rather have a grammatical function than a lexical meaning. According to current syntactic models, a bare noun taken out from the lexicon cannot refer to an entity; it behaves more like a predicate, and in order to function as an argument in the sentence (i.e. subject, object or other complement of the verb), its referential properties must be anchored by suitable devices. This thesis focuses on the notion of definiteness (as opposed to non definiteness) as a syntactic device for referential identification. Definiteness means that the entity to which the noun phrase refers is either accessible in the context, or familiar to the hearer based on his/her general knowledge of the world. The use of the Coptic definite determiners (the definite article, the demonstrative article, the possessive article), as far as standard Sahidic is concerned, covers all the semantic and pragmatic contexts where definiteness may apply. Demonstratives encode directly accessible reference and imply referentiality. They differ from the simple article in that they combine definiteness with some extra semantic content which is commonly described in terms of *ostension* and *deixis*. Coptic is a determiner-genitive language with the possessive article and the definite article mutually excluding each other. Indefinite determiners signal that the referent of the noun phrase is not yet identified, but it is a new entity just directly introduced into the discourse. Zero-determination or absence of article also has an important function. It marks that the noun phrase does not refer to any identifiable entity of the discourse. Non-referential nouns in Coptic typically appear in predicative contexts, for instance, as complements either of the (locative-identificational) preposition **ⲡ-**, of the comparative preposition **ⲉⲱⲥ**, or incorporated into verbs with a relatively little semantic content (e.g. **ⲉⲡ-**, **ⲧ-**, **ⲭ-**). They also appear in negative contexts, where the existence of any entity described by the noun phrase is actually negated.

There are two contexts in which definiteness can safely be tested in Coptic: the subject position of the so called Bipartite Conjugational Pattern (otherwise Durative Sentence or Adverbial Sentence), and the antecedent position of relative clauses introduced by the relative converter **-ⲉⲧ/-ⲉⲛⲧ**.

Nouns are determined to refer to entities, but are often accompanied by further elements that modify, specify or restrict their reference. Four such adnominal constructions have been discussed in the thesis because of their partial formal likeness: the possessive, the attributive, the partitive constructions and quantification. Possession is closely related to determination in its function of anchoring the reference: the referent of the possessed noun is often identified via its relation of the referent of the possessor.

There are (at least) two types of possessive patterns in each variety of Coptic, but the relationship and the distribution of the patterns is not the same in all dialects. The obvious formal difference is that one of them involves the element **ⲡ-/ⲡ-** as a possessive marker, whereas **ⲡⲧⲉ-** is used in the other construction. In Sahidic, the possessive relationship is expressed by *pattern A* unless the possessed noun is indefinite, has a demonstrative article, or is followed by an adjective or another modifier, in which cases *pattern B* is used. Pronominal possessors are expressed by the possessive articles, or by the suffix pronoun introduced by the corresponding *status pronimalis* of the preposition **ⲡⲧⲉ-**. The **ⲡ-** element in *pattern A* cannot

be conceived as a preposition, while the linking elements in *pattern B* ( $\bar{\text{n}}\text{T}\epsilon\text{-}/\bar{\text{n}}\text{T}\alpha\text{=}$ ) are the context-dependent allomorphs of the same morpheme, which can be easily considered to be a preposition.

The elements of an attributive construction in Coptic are not adjoined directly, but are mediated by the linking element  $\bar{\text{n}}\text{-}$ . This morpheme is apparently identical with the linking element in the possessive constructions (*nota relationis*), but the two types (both the linking morphemes and the constructions) are consistently kept apart in the thesis. The second element of the attributive construction, the modifier introduced by  $\bar{\text{n}}\text{-}$ , cannot have any determiner, and, at the same time, the construction as a whole can have any sort of determiner (definite, indefinite, demonstrative, or even a possessive article), which shows that the attributive expansion does not affect the degree of definiteness of the phrase in the way it is conditioned in possessive *Pattern A*.

The partitive construction expresses a relationship in which one or more items belong to a group; they pick out a subset of a total, and the referent(s) of this subset is/(are) not identifiable. The noun phrase remains specific indefinite, but the second element of the construction is necessarily definite, usually either plural or a collective noun. The linking element is a real preposition with two interrelated allomorphs, in *status nominalis* and *pronominalis* ( $\text{n-}/\text{m}\text{o=}$ ), depending on the form of the complement.

The function of quantifiers (such as cardinal numbers and expressions like  $\text{z}\alpha\text{z}$  ‘many’) is to specify the lexical head rather than to modify it; they oscillate between appearing either in a partitive or in an attributive-like construction. The construction in which they appear is indefinite but can be further determined (by any of the definite articles). The only exception is the universal quantifier  $\text{n}\text{i}\text{m}$  ‘every’, which itself functions as a definite determiner in positive polarity contexts.

## Determination

Coptic has a fully formed article system, i.e. a grammaticalized determiner slot in the sequence of elements within the noun phrase. It was not always the case in earlier stages of Egyptian. The reanalysis of the *p3*-demonstratives as definite articles, followed by the emergence of the possessive articles, was one of the most important changes in the “nominal” history of Egyptian. This structural change did not only affect determination in general but also led to the complete reorganization of the possessive constructions, splitting them up into two main patterns whose distribution can basically be grabbed in terms of definiteness and structural adjacency.

The special cases of determination discussed here have in common the property that all of them result in a definite interpretation, whereas the noun phrase in which they are attested is not determined by one of the standard definite determiners. These special cases are the following: i.) determination by the universal quantifier  $\text{n}\text{i}\text{m}$ , ii.) the suffix-determination of a few irregular relational nouns, iii.) the  $\text{m}\text{i}$ -determination, which either appears in temporal and spatial expressions where its function can be derived from an earlier demonstrative meaning, or in set expression ( $\bar{\text{n}}\text{o}\epsilon\text{-}$   $\bar{\text{n}}\text{-n}\text{i}$ - ‘like’,  $\text{m}\text{i}$ -...  $\bar{\text{n}}\text{-o}\gamma\omega\tau$  ‘the same...’), or it can have an affective meaning if used in various attributive expressions.

Although both the origin and the synchronic system of the Sahidic determiners are quite well understood, other dialects seem to exhibit alternative systems with multiple definite articles in seemingly overlapping functions. Three case studies are presented to show that not only do the dialects diverge from one another but there can even be a significant variation among individual manuscripts claimed to have come from the same language variety.

Bohairic has two series of definite articles, which are traditionally called ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ articles. Based on the descriptions of their absolute (non-possessed) use, I propose that this distinction can be accounted for in terms of semantic and pragmatic definiteness. The referent of inherently unique nouns (such as *sun*, *moon*, *god*, *etc.* and several abstract concepts, like *truth*, *death*, *etc.*) is always identifiable, and so does the more abstract (but universally accepted) reference to a kind what generic noun phrases can express. This type of definiteness is encoded in the use of the ‘weak’ article. On the contrary, if the referent of the noun phrase can only be identified within the given discourse, its definiteness principally depends on pragmatic factors (i.e. the entity is already mentioned or its identity is determined by its relation to other entities already present in the discourse). This is what the ‘strong’ article is assumed to encode. Such a distinction will naturally explain why the opposition between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ articles is neutralized in the plural forms outside the possessives (non possessed plural nouns can only be determined by **ⲛⲓ**-). Inherently unique nouns are prototypically singular. If they appear in a plural noun phrase, they are practically shifted to another type and are no longer unique. Comparing the early Bohairic manuscript of P. Bodmer III. with the classical Bohairic edition of the *Gospel of John*, the variety B4 is proved to be more sensitive to the semantic boundary of anaphoricity, while the classical Bohairic determination rests more upon the lexical-semantic properties of the individual words. In the earlier text type-shifting seems to happen much easier than in the later standardized text version.

Comparing the apparently inconsistent use of the **ⲛⲓ**-determination in two Mesokemic codices made me conclude that either the previously established rules of **ⲛⲓ**-determination for this dialect are not specific enough, or the grammars of the two codices are basically divergent. In addition, Codex Scheide and in Codex Glazier, show a high frequency of demonstrative reinforcement patterns, an otherwise not too frequent phenomenon in Coptic. In this configuration a noun determined by a demonstrative article is followed by a demonstrative pronoun (**ⲡⲉⲓ**-... **ⲡⲉⲓ**). In many of these cases an explicit or implicit contrast or some sort of emphasis can be argued for, but in a few cases reinforcement has no obvious reason, and the question arises whether this patten is a mere mirroring of the Greek word order. The third mysterious phenomenon to be observed in Mesokemic is the occasional use of **ⲛⲉⲛ**- for a plural definite article in Codex Schøyen (specific to this manuscript). This form of the plural article is not exceptional, but its distribution in Codex Schøyen differs from the one in the other dialects. **ⲛⲉⲛ**- appears side by side with **ⲛ**-, as a pure variant of it, not forming a paradigm with the singular definite articles. (Note that the long article **ⲛⲉ**- and the **ⲛⲓ**- form are also present in the system.) I examined all the data to explore what are the conditions of the use of **ⲛⲉⲛ**-, but with no positive results. Apparently no phonological or morphological constraints can be established: it appears before vowels as well as before consonants, with sonorants just as well with obstruents. The syntactic/distributional constraints, first recognized for Bohairic, are not met either: **ⲛⲉⲛ**- freely occurs both in possessive constructions and in absolute use. Neither does a stronger deixis/anaphoric use, nor affectivity/emphasis seem to be involved when it appears – at least not in a systematic fashion.

The forms **n-**, **ne-** are not attested at all in the early Fayyumic manuscript of BM Or. 5707 (while the corresponding singular forms are regularly used). The simple definite **π-** and **τ-** seem to form a paradigm with **ni-** in absolute use and with **nn-** in possessive structures. BM Or. 6948 resembles more to the Bohairic system.

### Possessive constructions

All Coptic dialects have two different possessive constructions, but the conditions on their distribution seem to vary. I argue for a purely syntactic formulation of the distribution between the two possessive patterns in Sahidic: *Pattern A* is used in the case of simple definite possessed nouns, while *Pattern B* (the historically newer construction) is applied elsewhere, i.e. practically in all other cases, such as with indefinite or modified possessed nouns and even with a possessed noun expanded by a demonstrative. In other words, *Pattern A* requires obligatory (and simple) definiteness of the possessed noun as well as strict adjacency between the possessee and the possessor. However, the distribution of *Pattern A* and *B* is not complementary: Although *Pattern B* seems to be used in all the syntactic environments from which *Pattern A* is excluded, *Pattern B* may be found also with simple determination of the possessed noun, which suggests an asymmetrical relationship between the two patterns.

Looking for a scenario of reconstruction in which syntax has a decisive role, I accepted the hypothesis of Leo Depuydt (2010), who offers a purely syntactic analysis to account for the changes in the history of the Egyptian noun phrase. According to his approach, the entire process began with the emergence of the possessive article in Late Egyptian replacing the original *noun + suffix pronoun* construction. As the possessive article necessarily entails the definiteness of the whole phrase, a new strategy was needed for the cases when the pronominal possessor has an indefinite noun as its possessee or a noun modified by a demonstrative. One of the new strategies for this configuration was to apply the preposition *mdj/mtw* to introduce the pronominal possessor. This strategy later spread over the patterns with nominal possessors as well, producing, at the end of this restructuring process, a completely split system in terms of the highly regularized distribution of possessive *Pattern A* and *B* in Coptic. True oscillation between the two patterns is only attested in predicative use, where definiteness is somewhat neutralized.

Inquiring into the issue whether this particular distribution between *pattern A* and *pattern B* in Coptic had any historical precedent – even if not in a formal but in a functional sense – I found that the constraints that condition the use of *pattern A* (the obligatory definiteness and the direct adjacency) are reminiscent of the ones required to form the so called *status constructus* in certain languages. The existence of such a construction has also been proposed for the early history of the Egyptian language, and it can be justified by syntactic factors such as the survival of the Late Egyptian and Demotic *A pʒ B* and *A n pʒ B* patterns as well as by its morphological traces in Coptic lexicalized compounds. The productivity of this construct state-like direct genitive was somehow limited as early as in Old and Middle Egyptian, and the construction was gradually replaced by the analytic pattern of the indirect genitive. It is remarkable to follow the linguistic cycle in which a formal and functional opposition first neutralized, quasi disappeared, and later functionally re-emerged in the distribution of the two Coptic possessive patterns: the Coptic *pattern A*, which is the successor of the analytic type formally, functionally got reduced to the syntactic environments in which the possessed noun must be definite and strictly adjacent to its possessor. This distribution is strikingly similar to

the supposed distribution of the earlier direct genitive construction. For the cases where these requirements are not met, an alternative structure emerged involving the prepositional phrase **ⲛⲧⲉ**-/ⲛⲧⲁ- (*Pattern B*). Furthermore, in the northern dialectal varieties of the language, the equivalent of *pattern A* began to decline again, at least became far more restricted in its usage, bringing about an alienability split within the possessive system along the same lines with what was observed in the earlier stages

All Coptic dialects have two possessive constructions, but on a closer inspection their distributional properties seem to vary. Based on an exhaustive comparative study of an early version of the Sahidic *Gospel of John* and the early Bohairic text of P. Bodmer III. I demonstrated that while the proportion of the constructions that belong to *pattern B* is observably moderate (7,4%) in Sahidic, it is just the other way round in Bohairic, where this proportion is 76,4%. The divergence can be due to the fact that rules behind the distribution are basically different. In Sahidic, distribution of possessive constructions is purely syntactically motivated while in Bohairic semantic and lexical features also influence the choice between the patterns.

In the comparative study the possessive structures of early Biblical manuscripts from various literary dialects (Lycopolitan, Akhmimic, Bohairic, Mesokemic, Dialect W, Fayyumic) have been examined mostly based on empirical research but also taking into consideration the observations already present in the literature. The main aspects of such an investigation are as it follows: i) how frequent is *pattern B*? ii) do the syntactic requirements hold (obligatory definiteness and adjacency)? iii) if *pattern B* is frequent, are the occurrences of **ⲛⲧⲉ**- motivated by some kind of lexical or semantic factors?

In the case of Lycopolitan one has to deal with three or four distinct dialects rather than with a single one. In the thesis only the possessive constructions of one variety (L5) are discussed in a detailed fashion, furthermore, some observations are made concerning L4, and the L\* variety of the Kellis texts is also mentioned. Examining the (almost complete) Lycopolitan version of the *Gospel of John* justified the commonly accepted view that Lycopolitan morphosyntax is quite close to that of Sahidic. The distribution of the possessive constructions is practically corresponds to the syntactic constraints established for Sahidic. Divergence when attested is either because the use of **ⲛⲧⲉ**- was unmotivated in Sahidic (cannot be considered more than a stylistic variant) or because the context is predicative, in which case oscillation is somewhat legitim.

A survey of the first twenty pages of the *Psalms of the Bema* in Allberry's edition showed that in the *Manichaean Psalm-Book* the proportion of **ⲛⲧⲉ**- with respect to the total number of possessives (145) is 21,4 %, which is evidently higher than expected. The use of **ⲛⲧⲉ**- in syntactically motivated cases, however, practically corresponds to the proportion attested in Sahidic. The unmotivated cases appear to be instances of a mere stylistic variation, maybe also driven by rhythmical or metrical factors considering that the psalms were performed singing.

An investigation carried out in the Akhmimic Proverbs (Ms. Berol. Orient. Oct. 987.), although it was not exhaustive, appeared to confirm that the Akhmimic version used **ⲧⲛ**-/ⲧⲛ- in contexts where an **ⲛⲧⲉ**- is expected in Saidic.

The possible possessive patterns in Bohairic have already received larger attention thanks, first of all, to the research work made by Ariel Shisha-Halevy on classical Bohairic nominal syntax. The patterns are summarized below (table 17 in the thesis):

Pattern		Name
Article type	Linking element type	
<b>π-</b> / <b>τ-</b> / <b>ν-</b>	<b>ντϵ-</b>	~ <i>Pattern B</i>
<b>π-</b> / <b>τ-</b>	<b>ντϵ-</b>	?
<b>π-</b> / <b>τ-</b> / <b>νϵν-</b>	<b>ν-</b>	~ <i>Pattern A</i>

There is a clear syntactic distributional rule in Bohairic as well that corresponds to the criteria established for Sahidic: *pattern B* is used when the possessed noun is indefinite (non definite) or modified by additional constituents. The problem is that in the remainder of the cases, where no such specific conditions hold, the proportion of Bohairic *pattern B* is much higher than in any other dialects. It is due to the fact that the use of Bohairic *pattern A*, or putting it more adequately, the use of the linking element **ν-**, is limited to such constructions in which the possessed noun satisfies certain lexical-semantic requirements. The categories of the lexemes that can enter in this pattern correspond to the conceptual lexical type of the so called inherently relational nouns. This means that their referents are characterized by a particular relation to some other entity, usually specified by means of a possessive construction. Relational nouns prototypically enter into this **π-... ν-** pattern, but for most of the lexemes, permeability between the patterns is possible and well attested. The function of pattern **π- ... ντϵ-** has not yet been satisfactorily clarified.

My major contribution to the subject is the analysis of early Bohairic texts in this respect. P. Bodmer III. turned out to be more abundant in **ντϵ-** constructions than the standardized classical edition, in which only 55,2 % of the patterns had **ντϵ**. The data in early Bohairic seem to be even less consistent than in classical Bohairic: several lexemes, even strongly relational nouns, oscillate between the patterns. The main source of the large difference between the proportions of **ντϵ-** in the two Bohairic versions is the relatively high number of the “intermediary” middle pattern, **π-... ντϵ-** in early Bohairic. I found 37 constructions of this kind in P. Bodmer III. and only the half of them were realized with the same pattern in classical Bohairic. The majority of the other half of the examples corresponds to a **π-... ν-** strategy in the classical version and two are expressed by **π-... ντϵ-**. The only conclusion of the comparative analysis is that the grammar of the possessive constructions in this variety is either very permissive with respect to stylistic variations or else it is too far from being understood at this point of the research.

Nevertheless, the remarkable proportional difference observed in the two dialectal varieties with respect the use of **ντϵ-** in the same text is striking and undeniable. If a language has two competing constructions for more or less the same grammatical function and the choice between the two are conditioned by individual lexemic/lexical labels (either formal properties or semantic features such as inalienability), it is usually the older and withdrawing construction that is subject to these lexical constraints. Viewing that the **ντϵ-** construction is evidently the younger in the history of Egyptian, the question naturally arises how come its use is more prominent in a language variety of the fourth century than in manuscripts of the same dialect from the tenth century or even later.

There are at least two answers that can be tentatively suggested: on the one hand, it might be supposed that the two versions (the one attested in P. Bodmer III. and the classical one in Horner’s edition) are not directly affiliated varieties; although they probably derive from the same proto-Bohairic dialect. On the other hand, if the direct relationship between the two varieties is preferred to be sustained, than one has to account for a rather exceptional

diachronic process: based on the data in the early Bohairic version the proportion of the lexically restricted patterns radically decreased in favor of the new constructions mediated by **NTĖ-**. The process, however, stopped at a certain point and a core group of relational nouns in the lexicon started to systematically appear in *pattern A* and (almost) exclusively in *pattern A*, causing a much sharper grammatical split in the distribution of the possessive noun phrases. This reanalysis could even result in a proportional increase of the older pattern, as lexemes with similar lexico-semantic properties to “the core members” also started to prefer the construction grammaticalized for relational and functional conceptual types. Such a reconstructed process is undeniably strange, but is not impossible at all. It is particularly acceptable if one takes into consideration that the process could be reinforced by the influence of Sahidic, the prestigious dialect of the first millennium, in which more than 90 % of the possessive constructions were mediated by **n-**. Even if the distribution was conditioned on different grounds in Sahidic, the mere quantity of the data (the high frequency of **n-**) could advance the consolidation of *pattern A* in Bohairic.

Checking the distribution of possessive constructions in Codex Scheide and Codex Schøyen, I concluded that rules established for Sahidic perfectly hold in the Mesokemic dialect as well. There are only 20-20 occurrences of **NTĖ-** in both texts, which is an extremely low proportion considering the length of the manuscripts. There are only 7 cases which are not syntactically motivated. The use of *Pattern A* is absolutely regular in the two codices. What is more, while Sahidic texts always present one or two counter-examples, no such “irregularity” has been found in the Middle-Egyptian Gospels.

Having collected and observed the data in P. Mich 3521. it has been concluded that the dialect W probably follows the Sahidic-type distribution, and, consequently, it can be related to Mesokemic rather than to early Fayyumic. Out of the 24 possessive constructions attested in this manuscript, only one contains the linking element **NTĖ-** and its use is syntactically motivated.

In the early Fayyumic manuscript of BM Or. 5707, the proportion of **NTĖ-** is 68,75 %, which approximates the one attested in P. Bodmer III., and in neutral (definite) contexts the ratio between the **π-... n-...** and the **π-... NTĖ-...** patterns is 5:8. The F4 text rather follows the distribution that characterizes Bohairic, as it was expected of course. The high proportion of *pattern π-... NTĖ-...*, however, relates this variety more to early Bohairic, which is remarkable. The lexemes occurring in *pattern A* are nearly the same as those attested in P. Bodmer III. (ϣⲏⲗⲓ ‘son’, ⲕⲉⲛ ‘name’, ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ‘disciple, and finally ⲉⲉⲗ ‘teacher’).

### Attributive constructions

The structural differences between the attributive and the possessive patterns have been demonstrated: the second element of the attributive construction, the modifier introduced by **n̄-**, cannot have any determiner; at the same time, the construction as a whole is not constrained with respect to definiteness, contrary to what was claimed for the possessive *pattern A*. The phenomenon of ‘placement opposition’ is characteristic of the attributive construction only, and this word order variation is most probably a secondary phenomenon that developed only in the Coptic stage of the Egyptian language (or directly before Coptic), and emerged only after the *noun n-noun* pattern had already been fully established and grammaticalized to express an attributive relationship.

The formal relatedness of the two constructions, however, is obvious thus it needs some considerations. From a diachronic point of view, the two linking morphemes are the same, since the source of the attributive construction is the possessive one. The syntactic and semantic preconditions for the development of the *n*-marked attribution were given. In the earlier language stages the so-called *indirect genitive* was occasionally used to express a relationship between two nouns that was more like attribution, or classification than possession. In fact, this pseudo-genitive pattern with classifying, categorizing function provided the structural prototype for an alternative way of attribution. What was a true innovation is that the semantic features shared by property-assignment and classification led to a new grammatical system in which prototypical adjectives (or one may call them ‘genderless common nouns’) also entered this pseudo-genitive pattern, with the old regular unmediated attributive patterns becoming irregular remnants. As soon as the *n*-marked construction became open for *both* gendered and genderless common nouns, it finally and definitely detached from the possessive pattern, and, as a consequence, the *nota relationis* started a new career as a generalized modifier marker. The new syntactic distribution between the possessive *pattern A* and *pattern B* might have a share in this reanalysis, since the semantically vacuous *nota relationis* in the attributive patterns did not take part in the definiteness opposition and had to step on an independent path of grammaticalization.