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978-1-107-03246-0 - The Ancient Egyptian Language: An Historical Study
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The Ancient Egyptian Language

An Historical Study

This book, the first of its kind, examines how the phonology and grammar of the ancient Egyptian language changed over more than three thousand years of its history, from the first appearance of written documents, *c.* 3250 BC, to the Coptic dialects of the second century AD and later. Part One discusses phonology, working backward from the vowels and consonants of Coptic to those that can be deduced for earlier stages of the language. Part Two is devoted to grammar, including both basic components such as nouns and the complex history of the verbal system. The book thus provides both a synchronic description of the five major historical stages of ancient Egyptian and a diachronic analysis of their development and relationship.

JAMES P. ALLEN is the Wilbour Professor of Egyptology at Brown University. He is a former curator of Egyptian art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and president of the International Association of Egyptologists. His previous publications include *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (1989), *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (2000, 2010), *The Heqanakht Papyri* (2002), *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (2005), and *The Debate between a Man and his Soul* (2010).

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,
New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107664678

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First published 2013

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Bell and Bain Ltd

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Allen, James P., 1945–
The ancient Egyptian language : an historical study / by James P. Allen.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-03246-0 (hardback)
1. Egyptian language – History. 2. Egyptian language – Grammar, Historical.
3. Egyptian language – Phonology. I. Title.
PJ1111.A44 2012
493′.15 – dc23 2012024808

ISBN 978-1-107-03246-0 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-66467-8 Paperback

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Preface

Ancient Egyptian offers an unparalleled opportunity to study how the phonology and grammar of a language changed over a span of thousands of years. For all but its final stage, however, its wealth of written information comes with the serious deficiency of a writing system that obscures vital phonological and morphological information. Moreover, the writing system itself was first deciphered just short of 200 years ago, and our understanding of it, and of the language it represents, is still being refined.

Partly because of these deficiencies, Egyptian has been interpreted on the basis of a number of differing theoretical models. In the realm of grammar, a model based on that of Egyptian's Semitic relatives dominated until fifty years ago, when it gave way to one based on internal syntactic analysis. That second model, dubbed the "Standard Theory" of Egyptian grammar, has vastly improved our understanding of the language, although in the past two decades it has come under increasing attack for defects of its own.

Amid the continuing struggle to understand the grammar of ancient Egyptian, relatively little attention has been paid to how the language changed over time, except in the realm of phonology. Egyptian phonology is still largely analyzed on the basis of Semitic parallels, but the validity of this approach has also been questioned in recent years. Diachronic studies of Egyptian grammar have focused primarily on the relationship between the verbal systems of Middle and Late Egyptian, which show the greatest degree of historical change.

The present study is an attempt to view the language in its entirety, from its first coherent stage, Old Egyptian, through its last, Coptic. The study includes a new analysis of phonology – necessary not only because of the question of the value of Semitic cognates, but also because the relationship between phones, phonemes, and graphemes partly informs the understanding of written morphology. Grammar is described both synchronically and historically, in the latter case looking not only at the phenomena of historical change, but also at the processes underlying them. Insofar as possible, the data have been approached objectively, with no prior theoretical bias.

The book is intended not only for scholars familiar with the ancient Egyptian language, but also for those with broader or ancillary interests. Transcription

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generally follows Egyptological conventions, but glosses as well as translations have been provided for readers from other fields; the conventions are listed on p. xi, below. Citations from ancient sources are also credited according to general Egyptological practice; these references, and the abbreviations used in them, are listed in Section 2 of the Bibliography ("Text Sources," p. 229).

This study has benefited greatly from discussions with numerous colleagues. I am grateful particularly to Mark Collier, who first enlightened me as to the syntax of emphatic sentences, and to Andréas Stauder and Sami Uljas, who commented on an earlier version of the book. I am particularly indebted to Andréas Stauder for his detailed comments and suggestions and to the Press's copy-editor, Steve Barganski, for his careful and critical review; both have made this a much better book than it would have been otherwise. This will undoubtedly not be the last word on the subject, but I hope that it will prove useful to future discussions.

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Conventions

1. Phonological conventions

In general, this book follows the conventions standard in linguistic discussions of phonology, with the exception of an acute accent in place of pre-syllabic ˈ to indicate a stressed syllable (e.g., *unú* in place of *uˈnu*). Italics are used for transcription; reconstructions (marked by *) are to be understood as phonemic, unless indicated otherwise. Egyptological conventions are used in transcribing Egyptian consonants and words. For the convenience of readers unacquainted with the latter or with the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA, used to indicate pronunciation), the less familiar symbols used in this book in transcription and discussions of phonology are listed below.

*	marks a hypothetical form, construction, or phonological reconstruction
>	develops into
<	develops from
≈	corresponds to
[ ]	enclose symbols of pronunciation: e.g., [b] as in English *boy*; in transcription, enclose restored text
–	unknown vowel in an open syllable
ʾ	glottal glide (or stop), like Arabic ا (IPA ʔ if a stop)
3	Egyptian phoneme, originally a kind of [l] or [r], eventually realized as ʾ or unrealized
ʿ	uvular glide (or stop), like Arabic ع (IPA ʕ)
ꜥ	Egyptian phoneme, regularly ʿ but originally/dialectally a kind of [d]
β	bilabial voiced fricative, like *b* in Spanish *cabo*
ḏ	"emphatic" voiced apical stop with various realizations (e.g., uvularized like Arabic ض, or ejective)
d̲	palatalized unaspirated (or voiced) apical stop (IPA ʄ)
ð	voiced dental fricative, like *th* in English *this*
e	Demotic grapheme representing an indeterminate vowel
ə	indeterminate central vowel ("schwa"), like *e* in French *gredin*

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ɛ	open mid vowel, like *e* in English *met*
g̑	palatalized [g] (or unaspirated [k]), like *g* in English *ague*
ɣ	voiced velar fricative (Arabic غ)
^{h}	following a consonant, denotes aspiration (e.g., [t^{h}] as in English *top*)
ḥ	unvoiced pharyngeal fricative (Arabic ح, IPA ħ)
ħ	unvoiced pharyngeal fricative (Arabic ح)
ẖ	unvoiced velar fricative (IPA x)
ḫ	palatalized unvoiced velar fricative (palatalized IPA x, or IPA ç)
ḫ	Late Egyptian and Demotic grapheme for ḫ < ḫ
j̓	Egyptian phoneme representing a vocalic onset or ending or the hiatus between two vowels, realized as ʾ or unrealized
k̑	palatalized [k], like *c* in English *immaculate*
l̩	syllabic [l]
ɬ	pharyngealized or velarized [l]
m̩	syllabic [m]
n̩	syllabic [n]
^{p}f	labial affricate, as in German *Pferd*
r̩	syllabic [r]
ɾ	tapped [r], as in Spanish *pero*
ɹ	apical approximant, like *r* in English *rain*
ʁ	uvular fricative, like *r* in most French and German dialects
ʀ	trilled ʁ
ś	unvoiced apical fricative (Hebrew שׂ), probably IPA [s]; in proto-Semitic, unvoiced lateral fricative (IPA ɬ)
ṥ	"emphatic" counterpart of ś; in proto-Semitic, IPA ɬˤ
ṣ	"emphatic" unvoiced apical fricative, like Arabic ص
š	unvoiced apical fricative (IPA ʃ)
ʃ	unvoiced apical fricative
t̑	palatalized unvoiced apical stop (IPA c)
ṭ	"emphatic" unvoiced apical stop, like Arabic ط
ṯ	Demotic grapheme representing a phonetically retained *t*
^{t}s	unvoiced apical affricate, like Hebrew צ
θ	unvoiced dental fricative, like *th* in English *think*
θ̣	"emphatic" counterpart of θ, like Arabic ظ
ʌ	open mid unrounded back vowel, like *u* in English *cup*
ɯ	closed unrounded back vowel (unrounded counterpart of IPA u)
x	unvoiced velar fricative, like *ch* in German *Bach*
x̑	palatalized unvoiced velar fricative (palatalized IPA x, or IPA ç)
^{y}	following a consonant, denotes palatalization (e.g., [t^{y}] as in British English *tune*)
z	Egyptian phoneme, probably originally [θ], later [s]

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2. Glossing conventions

For the convenience of readers who may be unfamiliar with ancient Egyptian, glosses as well as translations are provided for most examples, using a modified version of the Leipzig Glossing Rules (available online at http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/ LGR08.02.05.pdf). Lexemes are indicated by lower-case correspondents, and other grammatical elements by abbreviations in small capitals: e.g., *wš.tw* strip.PASS "be stripped." Personal pronouns are glossed by abbreviations indicating person, gender, and number rather than by lexemes: e.g., *mrr.k* want.2MSG "you want." Grammatical features are indicated by superscripts: e.g., *rmnt.k* depend$^{N/FSG}$.2MSG "that you depend."

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ABS	abstract
ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverb
COLL	collective
COMP	completion
CONJ	conjunctive
CONS	consequence
DEF	defined
DEM	demonstrative
DU	dual
IMP	imperative
INF	infinitival
INT	interrogative
IRR	irrealis
F	feminine
FIN	final
FUT	future
G	geminated
GN	gnomic
M	masculine
N	nominal
NEC	necessity
NEG	negative
NL	neutral
OPT	optative
PART	particle
PASS	passive

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PAST	past
PERF	perfect
PCPL	participle
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PP	past/perfect
QUANT	quantifier
REF	referential
REL	relative
SG	singular
SPEC	specifying
ST	stative
SUB	subordinating
SUBJ	subjunctive

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