

## DIALECTS IN PRE-COPTIC EGYPTIAN

### اللهجات ما قبل اللغة القبطية

*Jean Winand*

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## DIALECTS IN PRE-COPTIC EGYPTIAN

## اللهجات ما قبل اللغة القبطية

Jean Winand

Dialekte in vorkoptischen Ägyptisch  
Dialectes en égyptien pré-copte

*In scholarship there is no consensus on how to define a dialect, especially since the concept of “dialect” is a modern one, carrying with it political implications. Indeed it can be demonstrated that, historically, local idioms have sometimes gained national status for reasons relating to politics and culture. The existence of different dialects in pre-Coptic Egypt was discerned early in Egyptology, in the late nineteenth century, and is today accepted with only occasional skepticism. The identification and analysis of dialects is problematic for the Egyptologist for several reasons, among them the constraints of the hieroglyphic script, which was phonologically unspecific; the geographically unbalanced nature of the surviving corpus of texts; and the often elusive determination of textual provenance. Dialects have left written traces, however, in all areas of Egyptian—phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon—such that the standard view of a linear succession of five well-ordered language states (Old Egyptian, Middle Egyptian, Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic) can no longer be maintained.*

لا يوجد اتفاق في العلم على كيفية تعريف اللهجة، خاصة وأن مفهوم "اللهجة" مفهوم حديث يحمل معه تداعيات سياسية. في الواقع، تاريخيًا، يمكن إثبات أن التعبيرات الاصطلاحية المحلية، اكتسبت أحيانًا مكانة وطنية لأسباب تتعلق بالسياسة والثقافة. في وقت مبكر من علم المصريات لوحظ وجود اللهجات في مصر في فترة ما قبل القبطية، وذلك في أواخر القرن التاسع عشر، ولا تُقبل اليوم إلا بشكوك. يعد تحديد وتحليل اللهجات مشكلة بالنسبة لمتخصص المصريات وذلك لعدة أسباب، من بينها قيود الكتابة الهيروغليفية، والطبيعة غير المتوازنة جغرافيًا للنصوص الباقية، وصعوبة تحديد مصدر النص. ومع ذلك، فقد تركت اللهجات آثارًا مكتوبة في جميع مجالات اللغة المصرية: علم الأصوات، وعلم التشكل، وبناء الجملة، والمعجم. لم يعد من الممكن دعم العرض القياسي لتتابع أشكال اللغة الخمس (المصرية القديمة، المصرية الوسطى، المصرية المتأخرة، الديموطيقية، والقبطية).

**I**n the scholarly literature, there is no consensus on how to define a dialect (Ross 2003: 177; Funk 1985: 136, and see 1988: 152 for Coptic). To start with, dialect is a modern concept, often carrying with it political implications. There are indeed important differences between a language, which implies some degree of normative, legal, and administrative force, a dialect, which is often considered a lower

regional—if not folkloric—variety, and a regional language, which does not mean anything from a linguistic perspective, but appears as a compromise between political aspirations towards some form of autonomy and the centripetal forces at the national level.

From an emic (internal) perspective, the concept of dialect is anachronistic in ancient Egypt. In a loose way, one could consider the

court language spoken by the elite, as manifested for instance in the autobiography of Montuwerer (12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty; Loprieno 1996: 519; Stauder 2013a: 114), to be a dialect, in the same sense that there was a courtly form of Chinese used only in the imperial circle. Such an opposition between the vernacular and the prestige language in Egypt's Middle Kingdom may be captured in modern terminology by the labels "Middle Egyptian"—a stage in the history of Egyptian—and "Classical Egyptian," which would later crystallize to become the core of *Égyptien de tradition* (see Vernus 2016; Winand 2021).

This does not mean, however, that the Egyptians were not aware of some linguistic differences between distant parts of the country. A famous passage from Papyrus Anastasi I (28,5-6; see Fischer-Elfert 1983: 156-157), a 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty satirical letter, bears witness to the linguistic confusion between a man from Elephantine, in the South, and someone from the Delta. An earlier comparison from the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty *Tale of Sinuhe* (B 224-226), which is often cited in this respect, probably refers more loosely to cultural differences, without necessarily implying any linguistic difficulty of understanding.

If one more or less intuitively understands what is intended by dialects, difficulties quickly arise when it comes to proposing a general definition. Any definition of dialect is contrastive to that of language. One could here mimic the distinction made between sects and religion by suggesting that a language is a dialect that politically succeeded at one point in its historical development (as already cynically stated by Max Weinreich [1945]:

א שפראך איז אַ דיאַלעקט מיט אַן אַרמיי און פֿלאָט  
 “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy”). In this respect, politics was the major force for artificially splitting Serbo-Croatian into several national languages. It can indeed be demonstrated that local idioms were often promoted to national standards for reasons that mainly relate to politics and culture. The constitution of the main European national

languages arguably originates in what was formerly a linguistic regionalism: Italian can thus be linked to some Tuscan idiom, French to a linguistic variety spoken in the Loire area, Spanish to Castilla, and so on. Not infrequently, the emergence of a national language crystalized around a literary piece that had acquired an emblematic status, as was the case with the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio in Italy, or the German translation of the Bible by Martin Luther. In Coptic Egypt, first Sahidic, then Bohairic achieved such supra-regional status, coming very close to what would have been a Coptic national language in the same sense one now speaks of French, English, German, or Italian. Differences in writing habits, phraseology and, to a certain extent, linguistic patterns also characterize the regional use of the Demotic (Lower Egypt) and Abnormal Hieratic (Upper Egypt).

Several criteria are regularly advanced for defining a dialect in contrast to a language. First, dialect means plurality, while language implies singularity (or uniformity). A common assumption is that a language spoken in a territory can be subdivided into several dialects. A consequence of this definition is that a language is geographically more extended than a dialect. While this can be verified in many places, it does not need to be so, as a common language can also be a unifying force in a territory where several unrelated idioms are spoken. Such is the case for vast territories that are home to many different ethnic groups, like Russia, India, and China. This is what is in fact intended by the term *lingua franca* for languages whose usage was generalized at a supranational level, as was the case successively with Akkadian, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin in Antiquity.

As they are geographically or culturally distant from the central power, dialects are often assimilated to a lack of prestige or at least a lower social and cultural status. As far as we know, in ancient Egypt, dialects were never the voice of the state administration, nor the vehicle for expressing royal power and ideology. Of course, there was never something even remotely close to a language

policy in Egypt. This very idea is indeed anachronistic. The “school system” (or whatever contributed to the dissemination of knowledge) was probably strong enough to diffuse a kind of standard Egyptian that was used across the country for administrative purposes. During some periods, the central power attracted the children belonging to the provincial elite classes to be educated in the capital (on the *kap* [k(ə)p] system, see Mathieu 2000; on the palatine education in the Old Kingdom, see Moreno García 1997), which undoubtedly contributed to some degree of linguistic unity. In fact, when looking at the data from a broad perspective, there is a remarkable linguistic harmony and unity in what has been preserved in the written documentation.

While languages serve as a common linguistic umbrella covering a large territory, dialects very often can be relatively distant from one another. The large dispersion of the Arabic dialects from Morocco to Syria is an emblematic and extreme illustration of this situation. This was probably also the case in Egypt—a long band of territory stretching over one thousand kilometers—where the mutual intelligibility between the idioms spoken in the Delta and in the far South can be questioned (as suggested by the extract from Papyrus Anastasi I mentioned above; see Behnstedt and Woidich 1985 – 1999 for the situation of the Arabic dialects in Egypt). Is it going too far to suggest that, had Egypt been split into two distinct, autonomous political entities, the two main supra-regional dialects (North and South) would probably have achieved a national status, thus becoming languages in their own right?

One of the most common features that sets dialects apart from languages is their restricted access (or sometimes their lack of access) to any form of written media. The hieroglyphic writing system and the burden of tradition regarding the transmission of stylistic canvasses and fixed phraseology could leave only a tiny place, if any, for some forms of regional linguistic particularism. In this respect, one cannot exclude the possibility that for some regional elite classes the

unifying principle was a kind of common “hieroglyphic language.” From this perspective, the script, because of its (partly) iconic dimension, would have been intelligible across the country while being linguistically realized differently. To what extent this system would allow for significant differences is debatable, and the issue will probably never be completely settled due to the state of the documentation. Such a model is not, however, without parallel, as witnessed in China, where the script became the necessary link between otherwise mutually unintelligible languages.

One could of course endlessly discuss what makes dialects distinct from languages, depending on the viewpoint one chooses to adopt: linguistic, cultural, social, etc. A last remark might be useful here. Regarding the everyday use of language, one could dispute whether Egyptian, as an accepted, widespread, unified form of speaking, ever existed. When the sheikh told Sinuhe that he will hear Egyptian (*Sinuhe*, B 31-32: *r3 n.t km.t*) or when Wenamun asked if there is someone able to speak Egyptian (*Wenamun* 2,77: *md.t km.t*), what was actually intended? The situation of Coptic, where Coptic as an abstract linguistic supra-entity never existed, suggests that *md.t n.t km.t* probably loosely referred to Egyptian, in whatever spoken form it could take.

Dialect is also regularly opposed sociologically to other types of “lects,” like sociolects and idiolects, which can materialize in different forms (jargon, slang, argot, etc.). In ancient Egypt, slang, for instance, had criminal associations, as revealed in the corpus of the Great Tomb Robberies at the end of the New Kingdom (Winand 2018a: 136-137).

Unfortunately, the term “dialect” has sometimes been used in a loose way in Egyptology, even in its early days. Dialect has been used to qualify different stages of Egyptian in synchrony or stylistic registers. For instance, following a tradition going back to Flavius Josephus (*Contra Apionem* I, 14, § 82: see Winand 2020), Birch (1858) made a distinction between what he called the “*dialecte sacré*” (καθ’ ἱεράν γλῶσσαν) and the “*dialecte commun*” (κατὰ τὴν κοινὴν διάλεκτον), corresponding to the modern

opposition between “Égyptien de tradition” (Vernus 2016) and vernacular languages (Late Egyptian or Demotic).

More recently, in his study of the language and style of the Late Egyptian Miscellanies, Goelet (2008) called the idiom used by the scribes the “Late Egyptian dialect.” From another perspective, Goldwasser (1999) introduced the distinction between what she calls “low and high dialects” for describing different stylistic registers of Ramesside Egyptian. Beyond the terminological questions, dialect was sometimes understood as the minimal entity sharing some particularities not found elsewhere. For Coptic, this led in the specialized literature to a tendency to systematically reify as a distinct dialect any text that bears even slightly different orthographic norms (Funk 1988:184-185).

The issues that have been briefly debated in this introduction clearly show how difficult—indeed, hopeless, according to some scholars—it would be to provide a description of the dialects that existed in pharaonic times, as has been done for Coptic and modern European languages. A recent paper by Peust (2020), however, showed how opinions have fluctuated regarding the geographical provenance (*Urheimat*) of Sahidic Coptic. The aim of the present work is more modestly to suggest some clues for handling the issue of dialects and to provide some examples that could be considered as conclusive evidence in support of the hypothesis that pre-Coptic Egyptian, too, comprised a variety of dialects.

### *Methodological Issues*

#### *The state of investigation*

The existence of dialect differences in pharaonic Egypt was discerned surprisingly early by Egyptologists. Baillet (1882, 1883) was apparently the first to consider dialect differences in a contrastive study devoted to two decrees of the Ptolemaic Period, coming to the conclusion that there existed at that time two main dialects, one centered in the region of Thebes, another in the Memphite area. Baillet’s work prompted a study by Piehl (1882) devoted to some possible dialect


features in Papyrus Harris I (Winand and Gohy 2016: n. 18). Curiously enough, in his reconstruction of the history of Egyptian, Sethe (1924) did not mention dialects as a possible factor of change, although he correctly noted some non-linear evolutions and some apparent breaks in continuity between Old Egyptian and Late Egyptian. In a seminal study, Edgerton (1951) suggested that some features common to Old Egyptian and Late Egyptian but absent in Middle Egyptian could be explained by a common geographical, i.e., dialectal, origin (see also Edel 1955: §§21-22). In today’s Egyptology, in spite of occasional skepticism (Loprieno 1982: 75; Shisha-Halevy 2007: 25, n. 28, reaffirmed in 2017: 34, n. 5: “the dialect situation in Egyptian is as yet *entirely* obscure” [author’s italics]), the existence of dialects and their possible influence on the historical evolution of Egyptian is widely accepted (Fecht 1960; Adolf Klasens in an unpublished study mentioned by Vergote 1961; Johnson 1976: 105-106; Osing 1976; Kasser 1984; Winand 1992; Kruchten 1999; Peust 2007; Winand 2007; Musacchio 2009; Gundacker 2010; Uljas 2010; Allen 2013; Kupreyev 2014; Vernus 2014: 220-225; Winand 2014b, 2016; Funk 2017; Zöllner-Engelhardt 2017; Gundacker 2018; Ilin-Tomich 2018; Cahail 2019 [but see now Stauder 2020]; Uljas 2020; Peust 2020; Blasco Torres 2021; Gundacker 2021), even if the evidence sometimes remains elusive (Loprieno 1982: 76-77; Allen 2013: 5-6). The general opinion is conveniently expressed by Osing (1984: column 1074): “In addition to the normalized linguistic stages of Old, Middle, and Late Egyptian, and Demotic as well, that were used as written and high-level languages, there undoubtedly existed in Egyptian since the earliest times, and to a greater extent (...), different sociolects of certain social groups (according to status, occupation, gender, and age) and regionally delimited dialectal forms” (present author’s translation).

#### *The existence of dialects in pre-Coptic Egyptian: A question of common sense*

Indeed it is a matter of common sense that the very geography of Egypt supports the

presence of dialects in pre-Coptic Egyptian (Kammerzell 1998: 43; Uljas 2010: 374). In a land stretching over more than 1,000 kilometers, where most people probably did not leave the place where they were born and raised (although it must be acknowledged that there was, in fact, mobility in ancient Egypt), and at a time when there was no centralized mass education that could diffuse a uniform way of speaking (although this should not be automatically equated with the decline of dialects as shown in modern times), different forms of linguistic localisms are inescapable. This could also be reinforced by the presence of any non-Egyptian languages spoken around 3000 BCE in the Nile Valley, or in adjacent places Egyptians visited frequently, or where they settled, such as the oases, which could locally influence some forms of Egyptian (for substratic or adstratic influences, see already Fecht 1956). The existence of dialects in Coptic Egyptian constitutes an additional piece of evidence (Kasser 1990b), even if it would be misleading to mechanically copy and paste a situation that prevailed in a completely different political and social organization.

#### *The graphic system*

The graphic systems used in ancient Egypt present certain difficulties for modern scholarship. The hieroglyphic script is unspecific phonologically, and the vocalic system is generally left out of the transcription, rendering the isolation of dialectal features a major problem. A quick look at what makes the Coptic dialects different from each other clearly shows how important a precise description of the vocalic system can be. For instance, a common Egyptian word like *mn* “name” is usually written  without much variation (such as the possible addition of classifiers). Coptic, however, shows a variety of dialectal forms—the most prominent of which are designated by various sigla: A(khmimic), B(ohairic), F(ayumic), L(ycopolitan), O(xyrhynchite), and S(ahidic)—mainly based on differences in their vocalic patterns: p̄an (SBO), pin (S), p̄en (ALFO), and λ̄en (F). Indeed phonology, which remains the touchstone for the study of linguistic regionalisms (Kasser 1990b),

remains a subject of heated discussion among specialists, especially for the earlier phases (Schenkel 1990; Loprieno 1995; Peust 1999b; Allen 2020).

An additional difficulty is a direct consequence of the conservative use of hieroglyphic writing in ancient Egyptian society. As it was supposed to reflect the language of the mythic Primordial Time (*zp tpj*), hieroglyphic writing remained more or less unchanged over three millennia. As a result, the numerous steps of evolution in the phonology of Egyptian were mostly poorly recorded. The situation is, however, different with hieratic and Demotic. As they were mainly used for documentary texts, which frequently implied the intervention of less skilled scribes, these cursive writing systems were more open to diachronic innovation and diatopic, i.e., dialectal, differences.

#### *The corpus of texts and the nature of the documentation*

Another difficulty—common to any linguistic inquiry in ancient Egypt—is directly related to the constitution of the corpus of texts. As has been frequently noted, the corpus is unevenly balanced geographically (and socially). While some geographical areas have abundantly produced a rich and diverse body of texts, some regions are under-represented for various reasons. For instance, the conditions of preservation in the Delta were not fitted to preserve fragile materials like papyrus or linen. This is indeed very unfortunate as it was a major center for the royal, and also the religious, administration from the New Kingdom onwards. On the contrary, the documents coming from Deir el-Medina—and more generally from the Theban area—are over-represented in the Late Egyptian corpus, especially regarding the texts written in hieratic, which reflect some forms of speaking closer to regional practices.

Specific problems are also closely related to the nature of the documentation. A significant portion of the texts that have been preserved from ancient Egypt are formatted by cultural and ideological models (Polis 2017; Winand 2017a). In essence, even if there are

occasionally some manifestations of regionalism, they are rather frozen in traditional canvasses that opacify possible regional differences. Texts from everyday life (letters, accounts, judicial records, various types of administrative reports), recorded on papyrus or ostraca, are the likely candidates to show regional varieties. Unfortunately they are unevenly distributed, not only geographically, as noted above, but also diachronically. Except for some exceptional archives, like the Hekanakht papers, the evidence is meager (if not totally non-existent) until the mid-12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, and remains scarce during the so-called Intermediate Periods (with the exception of the el-Hibeh archive of the Third Intermediate Period; see Lefèvre 2008; Müller 2009).

#### *The provenance of the texts*

Ascertaining the provenance of the texts is an issue that too often remains elusive. This is particularly true for religious and literary texts and, generally speaking, for texts that are embedded in the flow of transmission. The provenance of the documentary texts is also debatable, even when their archaeological context is clear, for one cannot always equate the provenance of a document with its place of composition. Officials, for instance, would travel across Egypt. One can assume that they brought their archives with them. One cannot thus exclude *a priori* that a document found in Thebes could belong to an official born in Elephantine and educated at Memphis or elsewhere. In other words, a document found in Thebes is not necessarily a reliable testimony of the Theban dialect. Such a cautionary approach was tested on a corpus of Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period epigraphic material from Southern Egypt (Uljas 2010), the results clearly showing how crucial it remains for our understanding to be able to ascertain correctly the provenance of—in this case—some officials' family members, who could have settled in different places for the sake of their duties. A similar remark was made by Allen (2004: 2-3) in a seminal study of the Middle Kingdom copies of the *Pyramid Texts*, where it was rightly observed that some grammatical differences

could be attributed to a local dialect spoken where the text was copied, *or* to the copyist's own dialect, which likewise did not necessarily coincide with that of the place of the copy.

#### *Attempts at controlling the corpus of data*

As the questions related to the constitution of textual corpora have been gradually better understood and integrated in the scholarly debate, several scholars have tried over the last two decades to tackle this issue by limiting their case study to smaller corpora whose location can be safely ascertained. Musacchio (2009) limited her corpus to a place—Dendara—and a short (at least in Egyptological terms) period of time—the First Intermediate Period—with the aim of isolating specific dialect features. After discussing the possible discrepancy between Abydos and Elephantine in the Middle Kingdom as the places where documents were found, and as the geographical provenances of the documents' owners, Ilin-Tomich (2018) selected for his corpus all the Middle Kingdom personal names (c. 8,000 items) whose provenance could be asserted. A similar methodological approach was favored by Blasco Torres (2017) for uncovering dialectal features in personal names written in Greek during the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, and by Peust (2020), who also incorporated topographical names. In a more general way, the wish to control the parameters of a corpus chronologically and geographically—the dream of a synchronic corpus of a well-delimited area—was the principle that guided some major descriptions of Egyptian, like the study of Late Egyptian grammar by Černý and Israelit-Groll (1984) and Shisha-Halevy's work on Shenoutean Sahidic Coptic (1986). Unfortunately, such principles—well founded from a theoretical point of view—are impossible to implement most of the time for lack of sufficient data.

#### *The Dialect Hypothesis and the History of Egyptian*

The very simple schema, still to be found in textbooks, of five canonical stages of Egyptian—Old Egyptian, Middle Egyptian, Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic—

succeeding one another in a straightforward linear way (fig. 1a) is no longer maintained by specialists. Regularly, new observations in different domains—phonology, morphology, syntax, or lexicon—show that regional particularisms occasionally found their way

into the official written culture, while others more or less abruptly disappeared, only to occasionally surface again later, sometimes several centuries later. This gradually gave some substance to a new hypothesis for explaining the evolution of Egyptian. Already

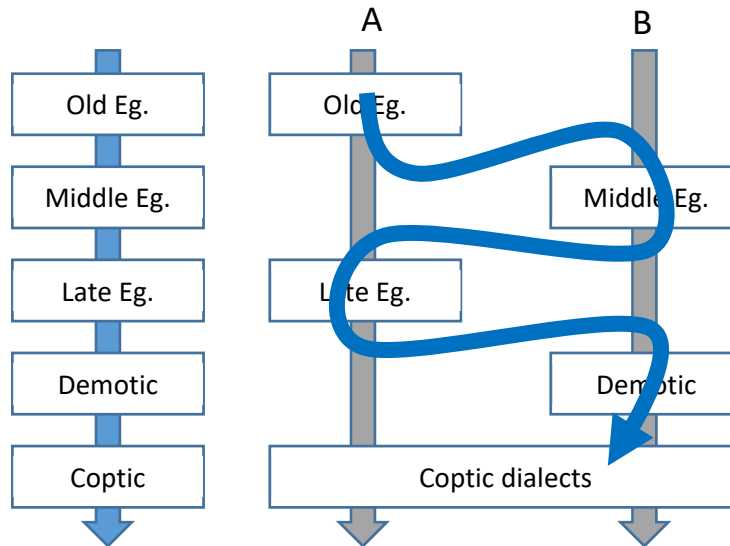


Figure 1 a and b. The canonical and revisited successions of the linguistic stages of Egyptian.

at the beginning of the twentieth century, Sethe (1924) had linked the evolutionary stages of Egyptian to the political changes that periodically reshaped ancient Egypt's history (see also Gundacker 2010). These dramatic changes were frequently symbolically marked by a change of the capital, which was often linked to the emergence of a new dynastic family with its own regional roots. One could thus consider the possibility that some local linguistic habits (dialects) could either benefit or suffer from such political reorganizations. As a result, the evolution of written Egyptian now has a more zigzag trajectory, as shown in Figure 1b. In this improved schema, theoretically dialect features could either: a) remain only in the colloquial form, or b) be integrated in the written norm. In the latter case, three options were possible: b1) they could become part of the official language; b2) they could disappear (for whatever reason) when the official written language moved to another dialectal basis; and b3) they could disappear temporarily, only to resurface

later if the place of their origin happened to become, once again, an important political or cultural center. In the last case, a regional linguistic feature would still be used, undetected, in the colloquial language, as suggested by the vertical grey arrows in Figure 1b.

Recently, Allen (2015: 1) expressed the radical opinion that the different written stages of Egyptian should be rather considered as dialects. This is an extreme attitude, indeed, which contrasts with a previously more moderate approach where he (Allen 2004: 3) preferred to speak of the dialectal *basis* of Old and Middle Egyptian. The present author prefers to consider that the written language is not, in a strict sense, the manifestation of a dialect, but that the idiom common to the country at a particular time (Old-, Middle-, Late Egyptian, and Demotic) incorporated some dialectal features of the area where the new stage in the development of Egyptian took place.

The dialect hypothesis for pre-Coptic Egyptian has not achieved the degree of refinement that has been achieved for Coptic. Specialists generally consider only two main divisions, a Southern and a Northern dialect, while others prefer to work more cautiously with anonymous labels, like areas W and X

(Schenkel 1990), or Y and Z (Zeidler 1992). A good illustration of the difficulties of assigning the provenience of a linguistic stage of Egyptian to a particular region is provided by the case of Late Egyptian, whose origin has been sought in both Lower and Upper Egypt (Table 1). This is partly due to the difficulty

		Old Egyptian	Middle Egyptian	Late Egyptian	Demotic
Hintze (1947)	Area Memphis	■			
	Area Thebes			■	
Edgerton (1951)	Delta/Heliopolis	■			
	Area Saqqara		■		
	Herakleopolis/Thebes		■		
Edel (1955/1964)	Lower Egypt		■		
	Upper Egypt	■		■	
Fecht (1960)	Lower Egypt	■			
	Upper Egypt			■	
Davies (1973)	Lower Egypt		■		
	Middle Egypt	■			■
	Upper Egypt			■	
Schenkel (1990)	Area W	■		■	
	Area X		■		
Zeidler (1992)	Area/Sociolect Y	■			
	Area/Sociolect Z			■	
Satzinger (1994)	Middle Egypt		■		
	Other areas	■		■	
Allen (2004)	North	■		■	
	South		■		
Gundacker (2010)	North	■			
	Middle		■		
	South (Thebes)			■	
Allen (2013)	North	■		■	
	South		■		
Kupreyev (2014)	North	■		■	
	South			■	
Winand (2015b)	North	■		■	
	South		■		
Ilin-Tomich (2018)	North				
	South			■	
Cahail (2019)	North			■	
	South				

Table 1. Places of origin of pre-Coptic Egyptian dialects according to various scholars.

of interpreting the weight of a dialect feature in the development of the language. Indeed, if a dialect feature is fully integrated in the common, official language, let us say at Stage 1, its presence at Stage 2 is no proof that Stage 2 had its origin in the same area as Stage 1. Furthermore, if a linguistic feature is present at Stage 1, but absent at Stage 2, and present again at Stage 3, one is actually left with two possible explanations: the first one is consistent with scenario b3 above (exhibiting continuity), but there remains the possibility that this particular linguistic feature was re-created at Stage 3, independently of Stage 1 (Funk 2017: 59). As already pointed out by Shisha-Halevy (2017: 36), one must be aware of the pitfalls of the so-called continuity fallacy. In his approach to Coptic diachrony (i.e., the change in the meaning of words over time) through studying the succeeding steps of the grammaticalization of the periphrastic perfect, Grossman (2009) rightly observed: “Coptic has its own diachronies, and these diachronies have their own relations with previous phases of pre-Coptic Egyptian. Paths of grammaticalization and other diachronic processes seem to ‘get lost’ after a certain phase of Egyptian, only to be resumed again in some—usually neglected—variety of Coptic.” The case of the *j*-augment is emblematic in this respect. It was one of Edgerton’s (1951) main arguments to link Old Egyptian to Late Egyptian. More recently, the functions of the *j*-augment in either stage have been reconsidered with different conclusions (Stauder 2014; Zöller-Engelhardt 2017; Peust 2019; Uljas 2019, 2020). But even if one admits that the Late Egyptian *j*-augment has no relation to Old Egyptian’s, which is probably excessive, its expression in the written Late Egyptian idiom with a syllabic writing could be analyzed as a reflex based on a community of origin of Old Egyptian and Late Egyptian, as shown by the history of various words that are common to both stages.

### *Strategies*

These important methodological issues should not prevent us from finding strategies to

support the pre-Coptic dialect hypothesis. Dialectology is a matter of finding contrasting variants that can be geographically distributed. One is faced with a lot of variants when studying the texts. Which one is relevant to the issue of dialects is not always easy to determine. Typologically a variant can be a mistake made by a scribe, a mark of style, a particular way of writing, the sign of a sociolect or an idiolect, the sign of a different linguistic register, the sign of an evolution in the linguistic system, and of course the sign of a dialect (Winand 2015b: 243-244). In this respect, it is useful to briefly discuss what kind of linguistic features should be looked for.

### *What is to be looked for?*

As has been asserted many times by specialists (e.g., Kasser 1984), phonology remains the touchstone of dialectology. Coptic dialectology, for instance, has long been a matter of phonological distinctions. Differences in morphology, syntax, and lexicon, although acknowledged, have always been considered a welcome supplement, the burden of proof nevertheless remaining on phonology (Kasser 1990a: 186, Satzinger 1990: 416). Building upon previous studies where differences in the morphology of Coptic are best explained as regional variants, Funk (1991) argued in his presentation in the *Coptic Encyclopedia* that the distribution of the Coptic dialects significantly varies according to the viewpoint one chooses to privilege (phonology v. morphology).

In spite of the shortcomings of pre-Coptic writing systems, one can occasionally isolate some features that seem to point to regional particularisms. Differentiations in morphology and syntax should be easier to spot, as their observation is less dependent on the graphic system (with some caution of course as regards morphology). When one looks for later parallels, Coptic, as the last avatar in the diachronic evolution, can of course help in building a stronger case. On the other hand, it might be of no help, since numerous morphological patterns and syntactic paradigms had already gone out of use by the time Coptic was transcribed in writing.

As for the lexicon, one could hardly say that our present understanding of its functioning is satisfactory enough to make distinctions that could be paralleled with different regional uses. For Coptic, contrastive lexical pairs whose distribution is geographically conditioned have already been listed (Peust 1999b: 327; see also Feder 2001). This is, however, far from being the case for pre-Coptic Egyptian (with some notable exceptions like the *Wortgeographie* in Hannig ed. 2003 and 2006). If different words used for the same referent can point to a regional distribution, this is only the tip of the lexical iceberg that is still waiting for a principled investigation. Indeed, dialectal variations can also appear in selected meanings or dedicated constructions of a single lexeme. A word can take on a particular meaning or develop a specific valency structure in some cultural circles (sociolects) before being generalized to a larger community, finally ending up as a dialectal feature. Needless to say, our current level of understanding of the Egyptian lexicon does not allow for such a subtle analysis.

*The classic strategy*

The “classic strategy” is the strategy traditionally undertaken in synchronic dialect studies—namely, the isolation, in a territory where a common language is used, of contrastive linguistic pairs from all possible domains (phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon) that can be geographically distributed in meaningful clusters. This is what has been done successfully for Coptic.

For pre-Coptic Egyptian, such contrastive pairs have occasionally been evidenced. They can fall into two different categories according to their relations (or absence thereof) with the following stages in the development of Egyptian. Understandably, one is more confident when a situation can be matched with later stages, especially in the Coptic dialects, but the reverse can also be true. As convincingly put forward by Funk (2017), Coptic can encourage scholars to look at earlier stages to detect possible dialectal origins of unusual patterns.

The essentially homogeneous nature of the corpus made it inevitable that dialectal forms would coexist in their specific area with forms that were widely used across the country. The situation can be captured by Figure 2 (below),

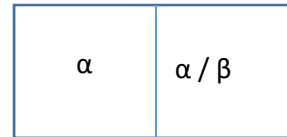


Figure 2. Schematic representation of a dialectic variation.

in which the rectangle represents the territory where the national language is used (here, Egypt), the two inner boxes arbitrarily represent two dialects (here, for the sake of simplicity, North and South), and the Greek letters stand for the linguistic features under consideration. In this schema, a linguistic feature  $\alpha$  found all across Egypt is challenged by a variant  $\beta$  in a particular part of the country.

In morphology, this situation can be illustrated by pairs of nouns that are monosyllabic in Upper Egyptian, and bisyllabic in Lower Egyptian, like *jb* v. *jbw* “heart,” *jh* v. *jh w* “cattle,” *nb* v. *nb w* “lord” (Fecht 1960: §153, 305; Gundacker 2019: 110, n. 259; 2021: 123, n. 127). In Late Egyptian, the paradigm of Future III provides another interesting case. This conjugational tense is characterized by a split pattern according to the nature of its subject. When pronominal, the pattern is *jw.f r sdm* “he will hear”; when nominal, the pattern was originally *jrj* NP *r sdm* (noun phrase) *sdm*, before adapting to *jrj* NP *r sdm* by analogy with the more common pronominal one (Winand 1992: 495-504). In the South—that is, mainly in the Theban area—one also frequently finds *jw* NP *r sdm*. Two remarks are in order here. First, Coptic shows the same split between an /e-/ morph and an /ere-/ morph before a nominal subject with a comparable geographical distribution (the /e-/ morph, realized as /a-/, being attested in the South). Second, as the pattern *jw.f / NP r sdm* was the only one in use in Earlier Egyptian, one can hypothesize that the

completive pattern for nominal subjects had, itself, a dialectal origin, and that it extended through the whole of Egypt when Late Egyptian was popularized across the country. The new Future (or Future III) is thus also an example of the Regional-to-National Expansion scheme, discussed further below.

The pronominal state of the so-called weak verbs (3<sup>ac</sup> inf.) offers another interesting case. Coptic shows that some weak verbs occasionally retained the old “feminine” ending -t. The distribution of the data shows clearly that in Bohairic, the main dialect of the Delta, this ending never shows up. In Late Egyptian, a study of three widely attested verbs (*jn*, *jr*, and *gm*) suggests that the absence of ending is more frequent in the documents coming from the Memphite area, and that correlatively the presence of the ending -t is, as is the case for *jr*, only seen in documents from the Theban area. As noted by Ray (1994: 260), this would also be consistent with the situation of Demotic.

Another similar, earlier, example is provided by the distribution of -sn v. -s for expressing the 3<sup>rd</sup> plural suffix pronoun in Middle Egyptian. As demonstrated by Fecht (1960: §162, 230, 251) followed by Uljas (2010), the *n*-less writing encompassed an area from the First Cataract to Esna, without excluding the traditional -sn writing. In this case, the area with the specific spelling is more limited than in the previous examples. It is of course difficult to determine from such sporadic evidence what this is actually the mark for: a small dialect, a sub- or meso-dialect (Kasser 1990b: 189), a scriptolect (i.e., a manner of writing linked to some scribal traditions), or possibly something else?

The copies of some passages of the Middle Kingdom *Pyramid Texts* also provide an opportunity to spot dialectal differences as the proveniences of the copies are generally well secured. For instance, the transmission from *sd*.f “he eats” to *sd*.m.f “he hears” by a copyist from Abusir should perhaps be better explained as the trace of a phonological confusion between two labiovelars, the occlusive /b/ and the nasal /m/, rather than as a reinterpretation of the text (Gundacker

2011: 75, with n. 325). As this opposition is supported by Sahidic Coptic ⲬⲁⲧⲃⲈ v. Bohairic ⲬⲁⲮⲙⲓ, one can more confidently see the differences in the tradition of the Middle Kingdom *Pyramid Texts* as dialect features (Allen 2004: 4-5). The same author came to the same conclusion in his study of the geographical dispersion of the verbal themes *m*- v. *m*ṣn- with certain verbal tenses, especially the subjunctive (Allen 2004: 5).

From the Middle Kingdom, other traces of regionally distributed phonological differences have been singled out. For example, instances of the change from *h* to *k*—that is, from a fricative to a plosive—have been studied by Ilin-Tomich (2018: 137; see already Peust 1999b: 118-119) and explained as dialect variants. Roquet (1979) came to similar conclusions in his case study on what he called the provincial “dialectianismes” in the Old Kingdom.







As a last example, which is at the crossroads of lexicon and grammar, the case of the lexical pair *šm/hn* for expressing the generic motion of going away from the speaker (or the focal center) deserves a quick look (Peust 2007). These two lexemes are in complementary distribution according to the grammatical tenses with which they are used (cf. French *je vais* v. *nous allons*). For some conjugational tenses, however—namely, the subjunctive, the imperative, the stative, and the infinitive—the situation looks more complex, as the lexemes are arguably geographically conditioned (Winand *fc.*). But other interesting remarks have also occasionally been made, for instance on the distribution of *rdj* v. *wdj* in Old Egyptian in the Memphite area (Kloth 2002: 133).

Other examples of dialectal differentiation in synchrony are provided by grammatical patterns that began to challenge older ones without being completely grammaticalized, leaving only faint traces, if any, in the subsequent stages of Egyptian. An illustration of this in Late Egyptian could be the emergence in the South of a new causative paradigm *rdj* + infinitive alongside the older *rdj* + passive subjunctive (oDeM 46, v° 2-3: *bn jr nṣ ḥrtj.w dj.t ḥṣb wꜥw jm.w jm* “the

captains will not send soldiers there among them,” instead of the more common *dj.t h3b.tw*). With dozens of attestations, this paradigm was the most prominent alongside other less frequent experiments for expressing the causative, like *rdj* + NP + r + infinitive (LEM 68,14: *jw.j r dj.t.k r b3k t3 šdh.t* “I shall make you work on the well”), *rdj* + NP + *hr* + infinitive (pSalt 124,II,15-16: *mtwtw dj.t rmt hr rs* PN (proper name) “and one put some people to watch PN”, or *rdj* + *n* NP + infinitive (oAshMus 119,1: *rdj.j n.f sš p3 wt 2* “I made him decorate two coffins”). The innovative pattern *rdj* + infinitive could tentatively be correlated with a rare construction found in some southern Coptic dialects for expressing the future causative—namely, Tε- as opposed to the “regular” TPE- (Funk 2017).

*The bypass hypothesis*

The “bypass hypothesis” elaborates upon a seminal study by Edgerton (1951), who observed that some Old Egyptian grammatical features that had gone out of use in Middle Egyptian resurfaced in Late Egyptian. To explain this phenomenon, he advanced the hypothesis of a dialectal distribution. As suggested by the light-grey vertical arrows on Figure 1b, at least some features typical of dialects A or B that were no longer visible in writing were still in use in some varieties of the language that did not surface in the written record. They could thus come back into the official language, if that language became anchored, for whatever reason, in the same dialectal area. In accordance with the name proposed for this process, these regional features *bypassed*, so to speak, the intermediate stage. Edgerton provides three examples of forms or patterns that were used in Old Egyptian and reappeared in Late Egyptian after an eclipse in Middle Egyptian: the *yod prostheticum* (*j*-augment) with some verbal forms, the agreement of the demonstrative (copula) in the nominal predication, and the position of the adjective in the nominal predication. Recently, Peust (2019) discussed the case of the *j*-augment in Late Egyptian, which could not be paralleled with the morph used in Old

Egyptian. If Peust’s analysis is correct (but note that Allen [2004: 6-7] observed that the *j*-augment in the Middle Kingdom copies of the *Pyramid Texts* were geographically conditioned), it does not necessarily invalidate the bypass hypothesis in any linguistic historical development. One could even claim, building upon Allen’s observation, that the use of this specific grapheme was a reflex of the Old Egyptian tradition. Indeed, Late Egyptian has in its lexicon several words that were first attested in Old Egyptian before (almost) vanishing in Middle Egyptian. Interestingly enough, these old words, once they re-entered the written language, took on a modern shape used for transcribing foreign words (see syllabic writing: Winand 2017b): Old Egyptian  *trp* “goose” > Late Egyptian  ; Old Egyptian  *swt* (3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. pronoun) > Late Egyptian  (possessive pronoun); Old Egyptian  *jn* (focusing particle) > Late Egyptian  (negative reinforcer). The same kind of phenomenon has also been advanced for explaining some features shared between Late Egyptian and Bohairic (Shisha-Halevy 1981), but the examples provided are far conclusive (Winand 2015b: 250-251).

Another case, which should be treated as an example of what has been called exploratory constructions, is the future pattern *twj r sdm* (tCarnarvon 4; see Stauder 2013b: n. 329; 2016: 154, n. 33). Built upon the regular Late Egyptian Present I *twj hr sdm*, this pattern continues, in a way, the parallel journey of the very widespread Middle Egyptian constructions *jw.f hr sdm* “he is hearing / he hears” v. *jw.f r sdm* “he will hear,” which actually have a common morphological basis with two different PrepP (prepositional phrases) as predicate. In Late Egyptian, this parallelism was no longer maintained with the crystallization of a composite paradigm *jw.f r sdm* / *jrj NP (r) sdm*. The pattern *twj r sdm* is, after all, what was expected considering the situation of Middle Egyptian. The fact that the suppletive construction *jrj NP sdm* > *jrj NP r sdm* can be traced back to some Northern area should

prompt us to consider a possible link between *twj r sdm* and some Southern usage. This could well be the case with the rare future construction  $\text{ⲕ-ⲁ-CⲱTⲚ}$  in some Southern Coptic dialects discussed by Funk (2017).

*The sudden-death paradox*

When considering once again Figure 1b, one realizes that some linguistic features, even very prominent ones, if bound to a particular area, can suddenly disappear from the written documentation when a new stage in the development of Egyptian begins crystallizing. In this respect, one of the most spectacular phenomena—and almost impossible to anticipate from an internal point of view—is the abrupt decline and ultimately total disappearance of the so-called sequential *jw.f hr (tm) sdm* in Late Egyptian (of which there are approximately 3,500 occurrences in the *Ramses Database*: <http://ramses.ulg.ac.be>; see Rosmorduc et al. 2010 and Winand et al. 2015), being replaced in Demotic by chains of the perfective *sdm.f* (Winand 2015b: §5.3.2).

Of a different nature, because it never fully grammaticalized, is the case of the new Late Egyptian progressive *twj ḥꜥ.kwj / ḥms.kwj / sdr.kwj hr sdm X* “(literally) I am standing / sitting / lying hearing X.” This pattern gradually emerged during the New Kingdom for replacing the older *twj hr sdm* construction that had by then become neutral in the positive as regards the opposition between progressive v. non-progressive (Winand 2015a: 313-325). While it remains difficult, if not impossible, in the present state of the documentation to assert the regional provenance of this new semantically marked construction, the prediction from an inner perspective would doubtless have been that it would in the end fully grammaticalize. Not only did it never happen, but the construction abruptly ceased to be used in the Third Intermediate Period (Winand 2021: §6.1.8).

A variant of this could be labeled the “not-so-sudden-death paradox.” A case in point could be the gradual extension of the Future III to non-infinitive predicates, i.e., adverbial phrases and the pseudo-participle (Winand 1996; 2015b: §5.3.2). The data show that this

new construction, which was first restricted to adverbial phrases, continuing a pattern that was already in use in Earlier Egyptian, progressively extended to pseudo-participles, to nominal subjects (*jrj pꜣ rmꜥ mn[.w]* “the man will remain”), to negations (*bn jw.f mn[.w]* “he will not remain”), and to syntactic markers (*jw bn jw.f mn[.w]* “while he will not remain”).

For Earlier Egyptian, Gundacker (2010) comprehensively argued that differences in how the pronominal subject is expressed in some proper names and in the interrogative pattern might point to regional particularisms. According to the author, the pattern *interrogative pronoun – dependent pronoun* that is attested in Old Egyptian, but fell into oblivion in Middle Egyptian, should be linked to the dialect that was the regional substrate of Old Egyptian.

*The unexpected-resurrection paradox*

The “unexpected-resurrection paradox” is the reverse process of the sudden-death paradox. As illustrated in Figure 1b (above) by the vertical grey arrows, linguistic features bound to a geographical area can remain alive independently from the written representation before eventually being used again in a subsequent stage of Egyptian. In this respect, the unexpected-resurrection paradox can be understood as an illustration of the bypass hypothesis. But there is a difference, as the bypass hypothesis develops over three different evolutionary stages, whereas the sudden-death paradox and unexpected-resurrection paradox occur between two adjacent stages. Another noticeable difference is that, with the bypass hypothesis, the grammatical feature that eventually resurfaced later was not in decline, which is precisely the point with the unexpected-resurrection paradox. An illustrative example is the unexpected comeback of the preposition *ḥnꜥ* “with,” which was gradually and inexorably going out of use in the New Kingdom (Winand 2014a). Statistics show that the proportion of use of *ḥnꜥ* v. *jrm* to express the comitative (the grammatical case denoting accompaniment) was completely reversed during the New Kingdom: while *jrm* was

almost non-existent at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasties (5% v. 95% for *hn<sup>c</sup>*), its use steadily increased so that it ultimately monopolized the semantic domain of the comitative (95% v. 5% for *hn<sup>c</sup>*). Once again, from an inner, emic perspective, the normal prediction was that *hn<sup>c</sup>* would quickly and definitely disappear. Quite to the contrary, *hn<sup>c</sup>* is attested again in Demotic—not at all in some syntactic niche, but in a variety of uses.

#### *The national-to-regional reduction*

It is very common for linguistic features widely used across the country to be challenged by linguistic newcomers that will eventually replace them in a new stage of the language. Instead of being eliminated abruptly, the older forms undergo a gradual reduction before disappearing. A particular case in this process is offered when the disaffection of the older form is geographically conditioned. Such a phenomenon appears to fall into two categories. In the first category, the older form is retained in some area for some time before disappearing. This should probably be analyzed as a trait of conservatism (it can of course be explained as a linguistic particularism, for instance phonology, but cultural and cultic reasons can also play a significant role). The second category is different, for the older form continues to coexist alongside the newer one for a long time, sometimes extending over several stages of Egyptian, without apparent restrictions other than the place(s) of use. It thus seems that what was once a neutral, regionally unconstrained form became restricted to a dialect (or group of dialects).

The first category might be illustrated by a study of Earlier Egyptian toponyms and geographically bound theonyms. Gundacker (2018) showed that the distribution of older v. later compound-nouns and the gradual replacement of the older intonation pattern by the newer one can be mapped on regional areas.

The second can be exemplified by the expression of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-plural pronominal direct object after an infinitive in Late Egyptian.

Normally expressed by the suffix pronoun *-w*, it is however not uncommon in the Theban area to find the Earlier Egyptian dependant pronoun *st* as a variant. This usage was later extended northwards to other parts of Egypt as a possible allomorph (CЄ) (any of two or more representations of a morpheme), with the notable exception of the Delta, where (Bohairic) *-OY* remained the norm. In comparison to Earlier Egyptian, there was indeed a significant contraction of this usage in Late Egyptian, followed by a moderate expansion afterwards. From Late Egyptian onwards, it was nothing more than a possible allomorph of *-w*, which remained the default morph in Coptic.

#### *The regional-to-national expansion*

More frequent and better documented is the reverse scenario, which actually is an important element in the evolution of Egyptian (and indeed of any language). As discussed above, older linguistic forms can be challenged by newcomers that eventually will become the new standard forms. It is not exceptional for the newer forms to be located in specific areas, being actually parts of a dialect. For political or cultural reasons, these regional varieties sometimes go through a process of recognition, ultimately being integrated in the new national linguistic standard.

For instance, Kupreyev (2014) suggested that the place of origin and development of the definite article in the late Middle Kingdom should be assigned to Lower Egypt (but to Upper Egypt according to Fecht 1960: §421). Another relevant phenomenon in the transition from Middle Egyptian to Late Egyptian is the sporadic appearance of the negative marker *bw* (instead of *n/nm*), which can be traced back to Northern Upper Egypt (Ilin-Tomich 2018: 138; see also el-Hamrawi 2007).

While the expression of the nominal subject of the Future III in Late Egyptian (*jrj* NP [*r*] *sdm*), whose origin could be placed in the north, has already been discussed, the case of the emergence of the Late Egyptian 3<sup>rd</sup>-person plural suffix pronoun is also worth

mentioning. The newer form *-w* first appeared in texts that can be related to the Memphite area. In the Theban area (as it had everywhere else), *-sn* had virtually disappeared by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, but was still retained in some documentary texts in the Third Intermediate Period (Winand 2015b: §6.3.2). This could suggest a dialect split.

A subcategory in this respect is provided by exploratory forms or constructions. Such forms, mainly built by analogy, pop up in various stages of Egyptian in a very limited number of occurrences. While some will never resurface, other forms, however, can reappear, with a slight modification, to be integrated in a new linguistic norm. Examples of exploratory constructions are *twj r sdm*, noted above, and *nn sw r sdm*, which showed up in the tomb of Ankhtifi in the First Intermediate Period (Mo'alla II,α,2; see Vandier 1950). The exact meaning and linguistic status of the latter construction are, however, still disputed (Stauder 2013a: 371, n. 140; Winand 2015b: 254). In this respect, one can wonder whether the only occurrence so far of *nn sw hr sdm* for negating the progressive in Middle Egyptian can be considered an exploratory construction. The fact that this hapax (a form occurring only twice in a text) comes from a literary text (*Shipwrecked Sailor*, 73-75; see Winand 2021: §6.1.6 and n. 144) gives a special weight to the hypothesis, especially if one carefully examines the rhetoric style displayed in this specific passage. It is indeed well known that literary texts have a long tradition of being

contexts in which linguistic and lexical innovation is tempted and tested.

### *Concluding Remarks*

For reasons that mainly relate to the use of writing in pre-Coptic Egypt and to the constraints of the hieroglyphic system, we will probably never reach the same degree of sophistication in our understanding of linguistic regionalisms as that which has been achieved for the Coptic dialects. The hypothesis of the existence of dialects in pre-Coptic Egypt could hardly be seriously challenged, not only by virtue of common sense but also through comparison with similar situations as shown by countless studies in historical linguistics.

Dialects have left traces in writing since the Old Kingdom in all areas of Egyptian: phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. This fragmented picture of Egyptian compels us to review our traditionally assumed reconstruction of the history of the language from the earliest times to the appearance of Coptic. The classical view of a linear succession of five well-ordered language states (Old Egyptian, Middle Egyptian, Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic) can no longer be maintained. Evidence shows that the evolution of the written language and therefore of the common idiom was influenced by regional features that were typical of the area that was promoted to a new, politically significant status.

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## *Bibliographic Notes*

The origin of Coptic dialects has been studied by Satzinger (1985 and 1990) and Peust (2020). There is currently no monograph, however, on pre-Coptic dialects. Except for a study by Kammerzell (1998), unfortunately unpublished, what comes closest is probably Allen's work on the history of Egyptian (Allen 2013), where dozens of remarks relating to particulars of dialects can be found. The role of dialects in the history of Egyptian has been exposed and problematized by Edgerton (1951), followed by Vergote (1961). Egyptian dialects have been the subject of an entry, by Osing (1984), in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. A general review of the issue of pre-Coptic dialects with a special focus on the situation of Late Egyptian is presented by Winand (2015b). There are several studies devoted to the issue of dialects for a specific corpus, like Allen (2004) for the *Pyramid Texts*, Roquet (1979) for Old Egyptian, Musacchio (2009) for the First

Intermediate Period, Uljas (2010) for later Middle Egyptian, Israelit-Groll (1984 and 1987), el-Hamrawi (2007), and Winand (2018b) for Late Egyptian, and Lexa (1934), with some caution, and Johnson (1976) for Demotic. Typological links between pre-Coptic Egyptian and specific Coptic dialects have been exposed by Shisha-Halevy (1981). The specialized literature is abundant with various topics more or less closely relevant to the issue of dialects in pre-Coptic times. Differences in graphemics, which can be interpreted as traces of meaningful differences in phonology, have prompted sophisticated discussions on their possible relations to dialectal variation, as shown by Fecht (1960), Osing (1976) in a general way, Roquet (1979), and Gundacker (2010, 2018, and 2021) for Old Egyptian, and by Blasco Torres (2017) for the Ptolemaic Period. In this respect, the status of the so-called *jod prostheticum* (or *j*-augment) has often been a matter for discussion (Peust 2019; Satzinger 1994; Uljas 2019 and 2020; Zöllner-Engelhardt 2017).

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The Ramses Electronic Database: <http://ramses.ulg.ac.be>

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- Figure 1a,b. The canonical and revisited successions of the linguistic stages of Egyptian. (Illustration by the author.)
- Figure 2. Schematic representation of a dialectal variation. (Illustration by the author.)
- Table 1. Places of origin of pre-Coptic Egyptian dialects according to various scholars. (Table rendered by the author.)