

25
años
1995-2020

Panta Rei

Revista digital de Historia y
didáctica de la Historia

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Ediciones de la Universidad de Murcia



Panta Rei

Revista Digital de Historia y Didáctica de la Historia

2020 (2)

Revista anual

Fecha de inicio: 1995

Revista *Panta Rei*. pantarei@um.es

Edita:

Centro de Estudios del Próximo Oriente y la Antigüedad Tardía – CEPOAT

Edificio Universitario Saavedra Fajardo.

Universidad de Murcia

C/ Actor Isidoro Máiquez, 9

30007 – MURCIA – ESPAÑA

Teléfono: (+34) 868883890

cepoat@um.es

Web: www.um.es/cepoat/pantarei

Ediciones de la Universidad de Murcia – EDITUM

Edificio Pleiades. Campus de Espinardo.

Universidad de Murcia

C/ Campus, s/n

30100 – MURCIA – ESPAÑA

Teléfono: (+34) 868883013

editum@um.es

Web: <https://www.um.es/web/editum/>

Edición 2020 (2)

ISSNe: 2386-8864

ISSN: 1136-2464

Depósito legal: MU-966-1995

cepoAt



En portada: Montaje elaborado a partir de fotografía de una inscripción sumeria del British Museum (Wikimedia) (arriba) y fotografía de Miguel Martínez Sánchez (abajo)

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A Look Back into Ancient Egyptian Linguistic Studies (c. 1995-2019)

Retrospectiva de los estudios lingüísticos sobre el egipcio antiguo
(c. 1995-2019)

Carlos Gracia Zamacona
Universidad de Alcalá
carlos.gracia@uah.es
 0000-0003-2181-4663

Recibido: 23/12/2019
Aceptado: 06/06/2020

Abstract

This article provides a personal overview of the last 25-year linguistic research on ancient Egyptian, the language spoken and written in Egypt since the origin of the written Egyptian civilization (c. 3150 BC) until the disappearance of Coptic as a living language (17th century AC), the longest-attested human language. With this purpose, the main theoretical approaches and their relationship to teaching ancient Egyptian at the university are reviewed. Through the analysis of the more relevant bibliography of the period, four productive research lines are discussed: form and function; documents and the language; lexicon and grammar; and ancient Egyptian metalinguistics. The article ends with a short comment on the need of more corpus-based studies in the future instead of theoretically-based frameworks for interpreting the ancient Egyptian language.

Keywords

Middle Eastern Studies, Historiography, Bibliographies, Ancient History, Egyptology.

Resumen

En este artículo se propone una revisión personal de la investigación lingüística de los últimos 25 años sobre el egipcio antiguo, la lengua hablada y escrita en Egipto desde el origen de la civilización egipcia escrita (hacia 3150 a. C.) hasta la desaparición del copto como lengua viva (siglo XVII d. C.), la lengua humana documentada durante más tiempo. Con este fin, se revisarán las principales corrientes teóricas y su relación con la enseñanza del antiguo egipcio en ámbito universitario. Mediante el análisis de la bibliografía más relevante de este periodo, se comentan cuatro líneas de investigación productivas: forma y función; documentos y lengua; léxico y gramática; y metalingüística en el Egipto antiguo. El artículo finaliza con un breve comentario sobre la necesidad de más estudios basados en corpora en el futuro, en lugar de los basados en marcos teóricos para la interpretación del egipcio antiguo.

Palabras clave

Estudios sobre Oriente Próximo, Historiografía, Bibliografía, Historia antigua, Egiptología.

Para citar este artículo: Gracia Zamacona, C. (2020). A look back into ancient Egyptian linguistic studies (c. 1995-2019). *Panta Rei: revista digital de Historia y didáctica de la Historia*, 23-42. doi: 10.6018/pantarei.445451



1. Introduction

The ancient Egyptian language is of the highest importance for linguistics and the history of human language, hence to the history of humankind.

Ancient Egyptian was spoken in Egypt since the beginning of the written record about 3150 BC to the seventeenth century—very probably much longer before. Ancient Egyptian is also the longest-recorded language in the world: for more than five thousand years (since 3150 BC to the present) ancient Egyptian has been written and read and still is because of Coptic, the last stage of Egyptian, which is the liturgic language of the Coptic Church.

For the linguist, this situation represents the possibility of tracing the written mark of a large amount of linguistic phenomena through centuries and broad geographical areas: (almost) all changes a language can undergo under the pressure of its use, from social and literary variations to diatopic and diachronic changes in lexicon, grammar and style, may find their place in ancient Egyptian.

It is, alas, a well-established fact that linguistics, as a discipline, has almost exclusively focused on “living” languages, i.e. languages with speaking informants, and has left apart “dead” languages, i.e. languages with no speaking informants. It is also a well-established fact that this bias in the linguistic research relies on the sharp division Ferdinand de Saussure (1916, chap. VI § 2) made between the spoken and the written, and his statement that only the first was the object of linguistic study.

Apart from the fact that this position was due to Saussure’s need of marking a difference with the Biblical and Sanskrit philologies, and leaving apart the gigantic figure and fundamental contribution to the European knowledge of the Swiss master, Saussure’s banning of the writing from the linguistic discipline was more for the lose than for the gain. This point has been revisited since on theoretical grounds for figures of not minor influence such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) and Jacques Derrida (1967).

This brief article merely intends to bring the general audience’s attention to the ancient Egyptian language as a linguistic study item. For recent linguistic presentations of ancient Egyptian and its major topics in depth, the reader is invited to consult essential works such as Loprieno (1995), Grossmann, Haspelmath and Richter (2015), and the series *The Mouton Companions to Ancient Egyptian* (since 2019), published by De Gruyter and edited by Eitan Grossman, Stéphane Polis and Jean Winand, are already available to the reader.

Notwithstanding the obvious relevance for linguistics of studying writing systems, the present study only discusses the work on exclusively the language, not the writing system of ancient Egypt during the last twenty-five years for three reasons.

The first one is practical: the impressive quantity of studies devoted to the ancient Egyptian writing system semiotic aspects in that period precludes of presenting an adjusted picture of the research done (a short presentation is Nyord, 2015).

The second reason is programmatic and addressed to the linguists: to show that the paramount importance of ancient Egyptian for linguistics critically relies on its recorded longevity. In this sense, written records are just evidence of phenomena highly relevant for linguistics.

The third reason is also programmatic but this time addressed to the Egyptologists: the brilliance of the hieroglyphs has, since the beginning, inflamed the Western imagination. This bedazzlement has had a direct and broad impact into the practice of learning and teaching the Egyptian language as a matter subsidiary in some sort to the hieroglyphic writing system. This biased presentation of the relation between the ancient Egyptian language and the hieroglyphic writing system has obscured the fact that a language can be written in different scripts and that a script can write different languages, and springs from the prejudice that an alphabetic writing system is closer to the language than a non-alphabetic system. This situation is patent since the very beginning of the Western studies on ancient Egypt, whatever the scientific level: from ancient Horapollon to the present societies of the Pharaonic culture lovers passing by the eighteenth and nineteenth-century esoterism in popular culture; from classicists' prejudices on ancient Egypt as a "high culture" (Arnold, 1869), already present in the background of some Jean-François Champollion's letters commenting on the architecture (1829, p. 22-23 and 57) and still active (compare, for instance, the opposite views of Thornton, 2002; and Whitmarsh & Thomson, 2013) to some biblists' "Coptic-is-Greek" reductionism (Oréal, 1999) in academic context.

Now that we are close to celebrate the bicentenary of the origin of Egyptology (2022), a short glimpse backwards can provide some context for the remarks in the next sections. In the collective volume to celebrate the first centenary of the decipherment of ancient Egyptian writing system by Champollion, the brilliant discovery that put Egyptology as a discipline into a start, Vladimir Golénischeff (1922, p. 685) wrote:

Malgré un siècle déjà écoulé, depuis que la géniale découverte de Champollion nous a entrouvert la porte de l'étude des textes égyptiens, et malgré les efforts incessants que les disciples de l'immortel fondateur de l'Égyptologie ont faits, à sa suite, pour pénétrer les mystères de la langue égyptienne, il y a encore dans la grammaire de cette langue pas mal de points qui restent peu clairs et qui jusqu'à ce jour n'ont pu être expliqués d'une manière satisfaisante. C'est surtout la syntaxe égyptienne qui n'a pas suffisamment attiré l'attention des égyptologues, et c'est sur ce domaine que s'est peut-être le plus manifestée l'influence néfaste de l'école égyptologique qui a pris à tâche de démontrer que la langue égyptienne était une langue sémitique et que les règles de grammaire des langues sémitiques pouvaient naturellement lui être appliquées.

Almost a century later, and despite the many improvements by outstanding scholars such as Battiscombe Gunn (1924), Alan Gardiner (1957, 1st published 1927), Hans Jakob Polotsky (1944, 1965), Jacques-Jean Clère (1949), Elmar Edel (1954-1964), Gerhard Fecht (1960) or Jean-Louis de Cénival (1977), many issues are still to be ascertained: this time not from the viewpoint (Hagège, 1996) of syntax but the viewpoint of semantics and pragmatics; this time not to go further than the "Egyptian-is-a-Semitic-language" mainstream school in Golénischeff's times but further than the "One-form-one-meaning" mainstream school nowadays that starts with Polotsky's later studies (1976), and was hastily labelled "Standard Theory" by Leo Depuydt (1983).

2. Method

What follows is a showcase of selected linguistic studies on ancient Egyptian language since 1995 to 2019. The criterium for selecting the studies has been precisely their determined purpose of advancing our knowledge of the Egyptian language beyond the limits that the present *doxa* has given to the “standard” research.

In particular, three galvanic works led this way before 1995, and have thus been taken here as precursors of the future research on the semantic and pragmatic points of view: Antonio Loprieno (1986), Friedrich Junge (1989) and Pascal Vernus (1990). Loprieno’s and Vernus’ contributions marked a new path into verbal semantics, showing how form and function are to be carefully distinguished as analytical categories. Loprieno demonstrated that perfective and prospective semantic verbal categories are formally linked in Egyptian and the Semitic languages through gram t. Vernus proved the grammaticalisation path of the formal pattern preposition + infinitive into the temporal function ‘progressive’ and ‘future’ depending on the prepositions employed and their adjusting into a system through its opposition, respectively, with the ‘general imperfective’ and the prospective. As for Junge, he opened the way to the pragmatic studies with his analysis of the communicative strategies to express emphasis in ancient Egyptian. The path that these three studies marked has been an essential criterium to selecting the works included in this article.

The data necessary for covering the selection of works have mainly been extracted from the following sources:

- The proceedings of specialized international conferences (mainly the series named “Crossroads”);
- Some general reviews from the hand of specialists, even if previous to the earlier date of this review, including Assmann (1974), Polotsky (1987), Schenkel (1988), Junge (1991), Loprieno (1994, 2003).
- The specialized journal *Lingua Aegyptia* (since 1991); and
- The relevant entries (since 2013) from the *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* “Language, Text and Writing” area, which is edited by Julie Stauder-Porchet and Andréas Stauder.

Of these sources, international conferences best indicate to what extent semantic and pragmatic issues have found their place among the purely formal studies. This tendency is evident in Table 1, in which the number of articles devoted to morphosyntax, semantics and pragmatics in these conference proceedings is displayed:

Table 1

Conferences in ancient Egyptian language (by publication date of their proceedings)

	Linguistic points of view			Other subjects
	Morphosyntactic	Semantic	Pragmatic	
<i>Crossroads I</i> (Englund and Frandsen, 1986)	3	4	9	
<i>Crossroads II</i> (Loprieno, 1991)	5	3	11	
<i>Crossroads III</i> (Junge, Kammerzell and Loprieno, 1994)	6	3	6	
<i>After Polotsky</i> (Lepper, 2006)	9	5	11	
<i>Crossroads IV</i> (Müller and Uljas, 2009)	6	5	4	
<i>Lexical semantics</i> (Grossman, Polis and Winand, 2012)	0	9	1	3
<i>On forms and functions</i> (Grossman, Polis, Stauder and Winand, 2014)	3	4	3	
<i>Egyptian and Typology</i> (Grossman, Haspelmath and Richter, 2015)	6	2	3	
<i>Coping with obscurity</i> (Allen, Collier and Stauder, 2016)	4	2	3	
<i>Crossroads V</i> (Werning, 2017)	8	2	1	1
<i>Rethinking the Origins</i> (2018)	10	1	0	

Source: Personal compilation.

This table displays that: one, the first reaction to the Standard Theory came mostly from pragmatics (1986-2006); two, semantic contributions (including those that are usually labelled as “cognitive linguistics”) are minority, except for the volume on lexical semantics (2012) for obvious reasons, and the more balanced volumes in 2009 and 2014; three, last volumes attest to the growing of formal studies, especially *Crossroads V* (2016).

My criterium to assign these articles to the different categories can be disputed, indeed. Especially, some articles deal with semantic and pragmatic issues related to syntax. In most of those cases, I have considered the pragmatic elements more determining.

Notwithstanding this, table 1 gives a “gross”, preliminary insight into the general tendency of research during the last years. In what follows, some specific research lines are discussed which I have considered more relevant for advancing the knowledge about ancient Egyptian language.

3. Discussion

Four research questions have become central to recent studies on the ancient Egyptian language.

First is the dichotomy between form and function (3.1). Mainly due to the opacity of the ancient Egyptian writing system regarding morphology, how to establish the link between form and function has relied, at best, on contextual-based approaches or, at the worst, on speculative recreations. The question is still (and will be) central to the work of Egyptologists and linguists.

Second is the study of the relations between documents and the language (3.2). Deeply linked to the philological tradition, this kind of studies focuses quite naturally on the language as a tool to dating texts but also the other way around in providing a path to studies in historical grammar which have concentrated on grammaticalisation phenomena. This approach could be not free of circularity in that language is used to date texts and vice-versa. Even when the witnesses of a given text are archaeological or historically dated, the text dating is sometimes restricted to the text inscription on a given witness, not to the text itself, especially when it comes to texts of prestige such as literary and mortuary texts.

The third is the superseding of the grammar-lexicon dichotomy inherited from the mainstream formalist (structuralist-generativist) linguistics (3.3). This trend is the most promising and needed for studies. It requires a combinative approach of a large number of materials to take into account a vast range of metadata relating to the proper linguistic data, including spellings, linguistic context, textual context, communicative context, social context, among others, and, which is more important, how all these interlink to each other. It is not surprising thus if this trend has always been the most solitary (see section 2 and table 1)

Fourth is the Egyptologists' conscience of their own bias when studying ancient Egyptian (3.4). Although a minority, these approaches provide a new, necessary perspective to linguistic studies on ancient Egyptian and Egyptology as a discipline in the whole.

3.1. Function and/or form

That the term "Standard theory" for Polotsky's late developments was hastily coined in 1983, was made clear by some scholars already in the 80s but most definitively since the 90s. While it is true that generations of Egyptologists were taught under the many editions of Wolfgang Schenkel's teaching handbook (since 1980; see Schenkel, 1991), and numerous inside-the-box articles were published in those years (Depuydt, 1994, 1995a,b, 1996), two major works were published in the 90s that stressed a context-sensitive approach to the analysis of the central question of the verb forms: I am referring of course to Pascal Vernus' *Future at issue* (1990) and *Les parties du discours en moyen égyptien* (1997). Far from producing a handbook to ease the teaching of a too straightforward way of seeing ancient Egyptian (or any other human language in fact), i.e. one form for one function and vice-versa, Vernus stressed how forms, especially verbal forms, changed through time and contexts. That these changes had a direct impact in grammar became then proved: for instance, the grammaticalisation of the preposition + infinitive structures for "new" verbal forms (the progressive and future). These dynamic approaches were well attuned with influential linguistic works on grammaticalisation (Bybee, 1985; Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca, 1994; Traugott & Heine, 1991) and text grammar (Biber, 1989), which were challenging the prevalent

formalist approaches (structuralism and generativism). The first reaction in Egyptology was rejection (Satzinger & Shisha Halevy, 1999); then, much more significantly, some dozens of “new grammars” were published (Mathieu, 2013, p. 439). This fact can be explained whether by the revulsive effect of the new approaches, by the docent duties of their authors, in need or in search of a specific model fit for teaching their students, on the other, or even by the urge of the new university cursus honorum on the scholars, especially in Europe resulting from the *Bologna Process* (see Gracia Zamacona *fc.*), or by all these factors together and perhaps even others.

The jump from the pioneering work in ancient Egyptian syntax by Gunn, Gardiner’s grammar—himself a pioneer of linguistic pragmatics (Gardiner, 1951) unknown to the British school led by John Austin (1962)—, and the “Polotskyan revolution”, to the study of the ancient Egyptian language through post-structuralist positions had been one of quality: It would not only cause a shift in the research subjects (see the next two sections) but a reaction on the studies of the linguistic form.

On syntax, classic structuralist studies like Ariel Shisha-Halevy’s on Bohairic (2007) have been flanked by generativist approaches such as Christopher Reintges (1997), even by more idiosyncratic, hyperformalist studies like those based on mathematical models (Depuydt 1999a&b).

On morphology, several disparate studies have been proposed on mainly formal grounds to discuss the number, origin and meaning of verbal forms (Allen, 2013; Oréal, 2014; Schenkel, 2012; Stauder, 2014a,b,c; Uljas, 2011), which contrasts to more lexical-unit and context-based studies such as one earlier attempt by Jean Winand (1991) on the verb *ii/iw* ‘come’ to break through the graphemic opacity of the verbal forms, very much in the wake of the fundamental studies by De Cénival (1972, 1977).

3.2. The document and its language

The first of the shifts mentioned above pushed the research onto subjects that linked language and texts. This shift proceeded along with three trends: text grammar (or genre linguistics); text dating through linguistics; and the communicative aspects of the language.

Text grammar. The study of textual “genres” with a linguistic intent is not new in Egyptology (Hintze, 1950-1952; Junge, 1978) but has instead moved from more stylistically-based studies to more linguistically-based ones. Examples range from structuralist studies such as Díaz Hernández (2013), Marc Brose (2014) and Claudia Suhr (2016) with the intent to characterize a genre through morphosyntactic elements to the studies initiated by James P. Allen (2017) that focus on retrieving a whole grammar from different documents holding a (long enough) text like the Pyramid Texts—the first volume of the six planned works on the Pyramid of Unis has just appeared.

Text dating. Essential studies in historical grammar fostered the way to the possibility of dating texts through linguistic criteria. That is especially the case of studies that have focused on ‘grams’ (linguistic elements that take a role in grammatical changes, see Bybee, 1986) such as the auxiliary verb *iri* and the analytic trend in Later Egyptian (Loprieno, 1995, p. 90-91; Kruchten, 1999, p. 1-51), the passive affix/pronoun *tw* (Stauder 2014d; Vernus, 1998, p. 200-207), the specialization of *iw* for circumstances (Kruchten, 1999, p. 52-85; Loprieno, 1995, p. 91; Vernus,

1998, p. 194-197). This research line has produced some significant works on text dating in recent times, including Winand (1995), Stauder (2013b), and Moers (2013). Recent short introductions to Old Egyptian (Allen, 2015) and Late Egyptian (Winand, 2018) are available as well.

In addition to this, archaism, as an umbrella concept, has played a central role in the research about text dating and related topics (Der Manuelian, 1994; Engsheden, 2016; Gillen, 2017; Jansen-Winkel, 1994, 1995; Stauder, 2013a; Vernus, 1996, 2016). In the heart of the risk for circularity, archaism evidences the weakness in dating a text through linguistic features when the features can be archaic in the first place, i.e. intentionally used by the writer to pretend an older date for the text, out of prestige, among other possible reasons.

Communicative aspects of language. Sociolinguistic approaches focusing on the speaker's communicative strategies and how these are rendered in the texts have appeared in recent years, some centred on specific types of texts such as Deborah Sweeney's (2001) and Kim Ridealgh's (2016) on Late Ramesside letters, and the collective volume on scribal practices edited by Jennifer Cromwell and Eitan Grossmann (2017) with contributions on Later Egyptian (Late Egyptian – Demotic – Coptic). Other studies have in different degrees been concerned with semantic topics on occasions as well, but the primary attention has remained with the communicative aspects of the texts. That is the case of Mark Collier's fundamental study on the foreground/background Gestalt schema applied to the arranging of communication in ancient Egyptian (Collier, 1994), or more recently systematic studies on modality and subordinate clauses (Uljas, 2007), and pragmatic markers (Oréal, 2011).

3.3. Bridging opposing terms (Dictionary versus Grammar)

Semantic-oriented studies, i.e. those that face the problem of how form and meaning relate to each other in natural languages, are a minority in Egyptology when compared to syntactic and pragmatic studies. The pitfalls are many: if grammatical morphology is obscure, lexical morphology is even darker, and there is no general agreement on the basic structure of the Egyptian word. Essential elements in lexical morphology such as 'root', or 'prefix' are far from finding common ground for explanation in the Egyptological literature, ranging from purely formalist approaches (Reintges, 1994) to convincingly comparatist approaches (Takács, 1999-2007), following a more-than-centenary research trend: e.g. Gaston Maspero (1881) and Theodor Benfey (1844), respectively. In between, the need for contextualized studies has been stated but also on different terms: on one side, lexicographical studies (Meeks 1999) on the other under the light of lexical semantics (Winand, 1994, 1999). The main difference of all these approaches is that while lexical semantics faces the form-meaning link by looking into the interaction between morphosyntax and the meaning (the semantic interface), the other approaches implicitly consider that lexicon is a passive repository of words which is acted (selected, transformed) by grammatical mechanisms (norms). Recent dictionaries such as the impressive piece of scholarship achieved by Rainer Hannig with his series of *Lexica* (1999a,b, 2000, 2003, 2006, fc.) still adopt this view, while the institutional project of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* (2014) is progressively implementing its update of the classic *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (1926-1963) with linguistic information.

In two recent talks, Jean Winand (2012, 2015) has claimed the necessity of international, collaborative initiatives to produce a new dictionary covering the needs not only of Egyptological

(specialized and general) users but of (general and comparatist) linguists as well. This is not a desideratum for only a dictionary. Given the method and objective which is a stake, the desideratum is about a new approach to ancient Egyptian (or any other natural language) consisting in the combination of studying the semantic-syntactic interface through studies of large and coherent groups of words (onomasiological approaches) empirically and systematically analysed through gear-driven corpus-based methods (text mining).

A significant milestone in the study of the semantic-syntactic interface is Winand's study of temporality in ancient Egyptian (2006). For the first time, this work provides a comprehensive sight into the linguistic expression of verbal and non-verbal time in ancient Egyptian, displaying the complexities of the interaction between lexical time (*Aktionsart*) and structural time (morphosyntactic aspect-and-tense features) attuned with the long tradition of linguistic studies in one of the central topics in linguistic universals (from Reichenbach, 1947 and Vendler, 1957 to Binnick, 1991; Klein, 1994 and Bertinetto, 1997, among many others). Winand's study is not only for the benefit of the Egyptology to achieve a reliable understanding of linguistic phenomena unsatisfactorily understood until then (e.g. the reinterpretation of the verbs of quality as gradual accomplishments of implicit telicity) but of linguistics as well by having access to a wealth of linguistic phenomena that Egyptian is in an ideal position to provide given its longevity.

Similar works in range and scope are scheduled for publication in the series mentioned above *The Mouton Companions to Ancient Egyptian*: one monograph on the non-verbal predication has been recently published (Loprieno, Müller & Uljas, 2017), and a comprehensive study on the negation is announced (Oréal and Winand, fc.).

In recent years, other works have furthered this research line of semantic-syntactic interaction that have dealt with verbal valency (Hafemann, 2001, 2006), lexical semantics (Gracia Zamacona 2015a,b; Vernus, 2012, 2015, 2019), grammaticalization processes linked to lexical semantics such as the future one (Grossmann, Lescuyer & Polis 2014), or *ib* as a modal verb (Polis & Stauder, 2014).

3.4. Is ancient Egyptian our ancient Egyptian?

A final even if short note must find its place here on the question of how are Egyptologists studying ancient Egyptian language and with what purpose.

Bernard Mathieu (2013) has drawn attention to some issues on ethnocentrism concerning how some linguistic terms have been used in studies on Ancient Egyptian (see already Eyre, 1991). Mathieu's remarks perfectly fit in the process of "epistemological distance" awareness which has grown in recent years in Egyptology (Gracia Zamacona, fc.; Moreno, 2014, 2015; Nyord, 2018, 2019; Schneider & Raulwing, 2013; Vernus, 2013). In this vein, one should keep in mind as well the linguistic awareness ancient Egyptians might have had of their language (Uljas, 2013; see also Klotz, 2011; Kurth, 2011; Von Lieven, 2007).

An example of the more or less unconscious bias that can affect ancient Egyptian teaching is what can be named "The lure of translation": most classes are structured on decontextualised examples in ancient Egyptian, which the student is asked to translate and for which, too often univocal equivalences are proposed for the Egyptian words in the target language. Although not a method exclusive of the teaching of ancient Egyptian (which does not ease the pain), this method should

be substituted by more hands-on systems whenever possible, such as working on real texts with more time, and in teamwork (knowing that this is often difficult to match with very busy curricula).

Last but not least, it should be the teacher's chief concern to tell the evidence from the hypothetical in the class to help the student find their way through the forest of theories and the cliffs of the texts.

4. Conclusion

How distance has grown from the sources and how decontextualised approaches have taken the lead is illustrated by Kristina Hutter's (2017) monograph on the verbal suffixal paradigm. Hutter devotes her study to analyse the verbal suffixal morphology exclusively from the grammar handbooks. This approach provides a picture of the Egyptological grammar "schools" the value of which for the history of the discipline is undeniable, but no information about the verbal suffixal forms in Middle Egyptian. It is relevant that fundamental articles on the empirical study of these forms in Middle Egyptian such as De Cénival (1972, 1977) and Winand (1991), which are central to the matter under study, are not even quoted. A similar compiling study is Karsten Peust's (1999) about the studies on the phonology of ancient Egyptian.

To this absorbed Egyptology an empirically-based approach is profoundly wished and needed (Gracia Zamacona 2013): through the combination of exhaustive contextualised, empirical studies with multifactorial analyses to provide patterns that might be of relevance for the different linguistic spheres (phonologic, morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic), and their interactions.

The educational implications of the contributions which have been discussed in this article are as follows:

- one, to give a detailed picture of the difficulties in the structure, uses and study of the Egyptian language, and to avoid simplifications;
- two, to provide a precise idea of the difference between results proven and hypotheses emitted;
- three, to gain specific knowledge of the study methods in linguistics, and the possible research lines they allow to implement.

Corpus-based approaches lean on the empirical linguistic method of determining relevant patterns by using text mining quantitative techniques (Rosmorduc, 2015) such as corpus annotation and computational dispersion studies that are combined with flexible research lines to allow to study the interface between forms (morphosyntax) and functions (semantics and pragmatics). For this reason, they are the most promising approaches to improve our knowledge in the ancient Egyptian grammar and lexicon, then how to teach it, which has always been a constant preoccupation of the discipline (Depuydt, 1993; Junge, 1991; Schenkel, 1980; Winand, 2011). By proposing descriptions off case studies instead of illustrating theories with examples, empirically-based studies are bringing a new sight into the research and teaching of ancient Egyptian (see Fig. 1):

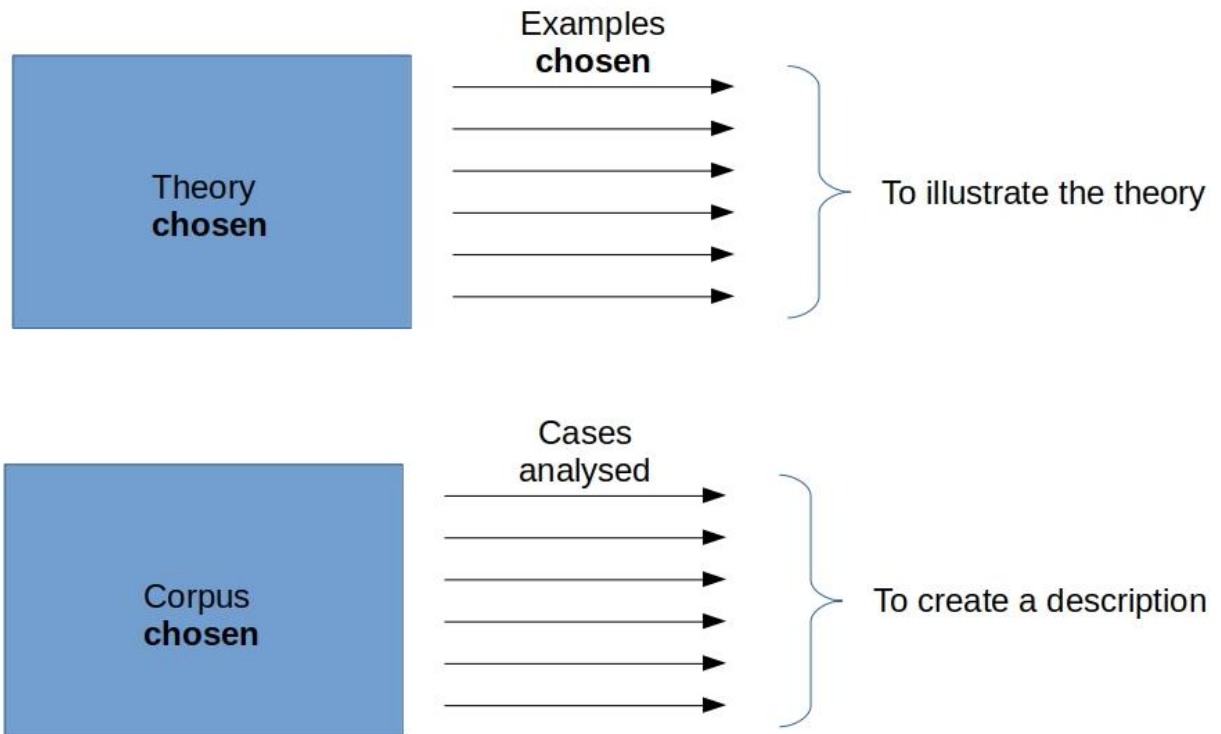


Fig. 1. Illustration versus Description. Source: Author.


Acknowledgements

This paper has been written under the auspices of the Project The Earlier Ancient Egyptian Mortuary Texts Variability (2018-T1/HUM-10215 Talento Programme, funded by Madrid Region).

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