

On Conversion, Clause Ordination and
Related Notions: Some Reflections on
General and Polotskyan Models

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This is a methodological and theoretical essay. In the following notes, I wish to present some reflections and raise certain questions on the tensions between terminology, conceptualization and analytic models on the one hand and linguistic reality on the other, focussing on an issue that has never ceased to fascinate me, namely the hierarchy between subtextual units — in particular, the so-called subordination or, more generally, *ordination* of one unit to another. In the context of Polotsky's teaching and heritage invoked in this solemn gathering, and for Egyptian and Coptic linguists, first of all, this issue acquires a special significance and piquancy.

1 *Preliminary*

Without outlining here in detail the terminological lineage concerned (a complicated task, for there are here various terminological and conceptual traditions of rhetorics and γραμματική τέχνη; I am not competent to talk about non-Western schools of linguistic thought) I wish to point out, first, that ὑπόταξις or *subordinatio* do not in the early Greek and Latin grammatical systems of rhetorics correspond to any “ὑπερταξις” or *superordinatio*; that is, they are by implication considered marked features — the opposite term (our “main clause”) is to my knowledge never known by any special name. If anything, ὑπόταξις is the marked term to παράταξις, which leaves the “subordination” notion entirely lopsided. The unmarked form of clause is accepted *ohne weiteres* as “main”, although it too may be retro-dependent, so marked by sentence particles, exponents of anaphora or of specificity (e.g. definite articles and demonstratives) and so on. Moreover, this alleged formal markedness (by conjunctions of relative pronouns) is extremely Eurocentric or ethocentric. Second, I wish to point out that there is to my knowledge, at least generally, no specification as to the reference of the subordination, that is as to what the hypotaxis is subordinated to — whether to any specific clause paired with the hypotaxis or a clause complex or to a comprehensive textual complex or to the text as such (in later and even modern grammatical writing, this marking is explicitly said to enable the clause to form part of and be embedded in a whole, which is a clause or sentence — by this very token, complex — H. Paul's “Herabdrücken eines Satzes zum Satzgliede”). However, it is fairly clear that the unit marked and the general frame of reference is here — as also by default today — the clause segment, considered as important and in many ways sufficient *per se*, without reference to its enveloping text; that is, a notion in the framework of what was in the Nineteen-Sixties and Seventies called “Sentence Grammar” when

opposed to text-linguistic analysis. Moreover, the question of relationship *between clauses* and *relationship of a specific given clause to its surrounding context* is hardly ever or never explored. Yet another question easily glossed over as trivial is *what* is subordinated (or converted): the sentence/clause as a whole, with actants and circumstants, or the verb form *per se* (see below, on Polotsky's Sentence Converter and converted tenses)? It is implicitly held that these two are identical to all grammatical purposes.

Be that as it may, this primitive model, primarily applied to and deriving from logical and rhetorical synthetic applications of Greek and Latin stylistic prescription, is still uncritically accepted today as a universally valid and helpful analytic tool. As a matter of fact, this model, originally tailored for the Greco-Latin linguistic-cultural environment, and then in a way so familiar to us was smoothly, implicitly, uncritically adopted, indeed taken for granted as a universal premise which is almost tautological, containing as it does self-vindicating factors, does not really help in achieving a fine and precise syntactical analysis for any language I am acquainted with. I have no doubt that it is not only inadequate: it is false, in the sense that it distorts our view of linguistic reality, if only because of its rigid, built-in dichotomy and its ignoring of most signifiers and signified concerned. (This is, incidentally, neither the only nor the most insidious trace of the logical filter to language reality that is biasing our thinking; the worst is certainly the Part-of-Speech model, to be discussed here later). A brief and more general parenthesis in this prologue: terms should ideally be clear, handy, unambiguous code-names for entities and/or concepts. But, while entities are at least ideally landmarks of linguistic reality, concepts belong to models and theoretic framework and are therefore metalinguistic or worse — and are fuzzy or ethnocentrically biased by our own linguistic background. At any rate, terms must not tyrannize us and manipulate, inhibit, program or unduly guide our thoughts and considerations.

In this paper, I wish to offer some observations that focus on questions in an issue I have been long worrying about, namely the relationship between conjunctions, converters and other means of characterizing a nexal constituent of the text as — as what? As *marked* in relation and contrast with unmarked textual units? What does full converterhood mean? What exactly is converted? And then, what does convertability tell us about the converted, and what does inconvertability?

All these topics form part of the fascinating, often fairy landscape of textual and subtextual markedness: personally, I find this one of the most rewarding directions of syntactic inquiry. Beyond everything else, this paper should also be received — in the spirit of H. J. Polotsky's research genres — as a minor preliminary contribution to a projected chapter in a future work on Polotsky's method and linguistic theory.

2 *Evolutionary record of HJP's terminology and formulation*

(The dates below are publication years of publication, and of course say nothing on periods of gestation and overlapping of research on different languages. All italics are mine. A. S.-H.)

Early days: French terminology.¹ *Deux verbes* (1937. HJP's first publication on Coptic, anticipating the *Études*): "Les Seconds Temps (in 1944 to be called Temps Seconds) sont des *formes relatives* et les phrases dans lesquelles ils apparaissent sont des 'phrases coupées'".

Une règle (1940. Article on the interrogative-focus Cleft Sentence in Late Egyptian): The Second Tense is a "forme conjonctionnelle".

Études (1944. The seminal *Études de syntaxe copte*, announced in 1937 as a forthcoming article): the Second Tenses (marked by a "particule relative") are a case of "la proposition convertie en nom", the effect of the relative clause being "convertir une phrase en nom". More specifically, the Second Tenses constitute a "proposition substantive": this is precisely the claim of Polotsky's *Grundlagen* of half a century later, and clearly implies early adherence to the Parts-of-Speech tradition. Incidentally, in the *Études* "transposition" is used to mean rendering (version, translation), "transformation" for evolutive historical change.

Rev. Till (1957, first review of Till's *Koptische Grammatik*): on the "Nebentempora"... "so wird man dem Adverb (im syntaktischen Sinne)² für die Klassifikation den Ausschlag zuerkennen müssen, ohne damit auf die Zugehörigkeit der mit Verbalformen gebildeten Adverbialsätze zum Tempussystem zu verzichten"... "[between verb and adverb, on the syntactic plane in predicative function there are] "gewisse Überschneidungen". These *Adverbialsätze* seem here already to be uneasy, like the problematic "adverb" Part of Speech itself; this was indeed to prove to be the weakest link, most open to attack, in the so-called Standard Theory. The Second Tenses, already presented as nominal, are not yet integrated in the *Nebentempora* (roughly = later "Satellites").

Neugestaltung (1959, review article of Mallon-Malinine's grammar of Bohairic Coptic): no converters are yet in view, but the satellital tenses are already set apart as "Partizipiale" (i.e. Circumstantial) "und präteritale *Nebentempora*" (as in 1957). The classification of tenses by negation suggested here (later applied to Late Egyptian by S. Groll) is of interest because of the symmetry it implies or takes for granted between the affirmative and negative systems. However, in Egyptian the latter is richer and more differentiated and sophisticated than the former.

Conjugation System (1960, one of the two or three true milestones in Coptic linguistics. 1960 to 1965 seems a personal *lustrum mirabile* of Polotsky's). The *Sentence Converters* appear for the first and (amazingly) the last time (the term was much more freely used by Polotsky in class, also in application to other languages, especially Turkish): prefixed elements that turn "Basic Tenses" into "Satellites". It is significant that *ne-* is here presented as the first of the converters, "converting *the tense* into the corresponding preterit", without any Parts-of-Speech

¹ The significance for terminology and even development of argument and exposition (as well as classroom usage) of Polotsky's choice of language (German, French, English) is considerable.

² This parenthesis is of considerable importance, in the context of the current post-Polotskian revisionism in Egyptian linguistics, denying the validity of the adverbial substitution-class.

associations whatever. The other two elements (relative and circumstantial converters) “convert *the tense* from a main sentence into a subordinate clause”, again with no specific Parts-of-Speech connotation. It is the Second Tenses (an old term, going back at least to the 17th-century grammar by Bonjour, for focalizing or thematized forms of the tenses; in most cases forming the topic constituent of a Cleft Sentence) that stand apart, “[being] formed by morphemes which offer a certain resemblance to the sentence converters (but are at this stage not converters! A.S.-H.), especially to the Relative... the Second Tenses are *on syntactic grounds* (i.e. the syntax of indefinite actor expressions and the existential $\sigma\tau\eta$, A.S.-H.)... better kept apart from the converted tenses. However, the Second Tenses and the converted tenses can be grouped together as Satellites of the basic tenses”. Note the distinction made here between “*Sentence Converters*” and “*Converted Tenses*”, not Sentences or Clauses: I take “sentence” in “sentence converters” to be roughly equivalent to “predicative nexus”, while “converted tenses” stand in hierarchical opposition to “basic tenses”, to a degree implying the primacy of the latter (cf. the oblique cases as derivatives of the nominative). It is difficult to see in Polotsky’s published work on Coptic clear early intimations of the conversion concept, but the impression of an entirely new development may be misleading.

Syntaxe amharique (1960, “Syntaxe amharique et syntaxe turque” — Polotsky’s only typological-comparative general-linguistic essay, and his only publication on Turkish grammar, published in the same *annus mirabilis*: the two 1960 papers are arguably his theoretically most significant contributions): *-dik* marks “une forme relative, tirée du thème verbal *par un procédé morphologique*”. Amharic *yä-* “particule, qui serve de ‘pronom’ relatif” (the strikingly different syntax of *-dik* and *yä-* may account for the difference in characterization; but the maintaining of ‘pronoun’ is remarkable, apostrophes notwithstanding — Polotsky used those sparingly), nor is “serve de” felicitous. Here too the Parts-of-Speech model is of marginal relevance.

Studies (1961, the first of several systematizations of the Neo-Syriac verb): *ki-* (pres.) and *bit-* (fut.) are combined with simple or compound tenses; *-və* “puts the sentence or form back into the past”. No converters are postulated.

1964/5 — Polotsky in a series of lectures as an annual course of “General Syntax”: 17/1/65 — on the theme question: “How do we subordinate a clause?”, defining “subordination” as “enabling a clause to fill the role of any clause constituent but the predicate”. Inclusion, inordination (*Einordnung*) were also used.³ Conversion was not discussed at all as a means of subordination.

Earlier in the same course (26/11/64), Polotsky discussed Neo-Syriac *ki-* and *bit-* as “particles”; *-və* as “past particle”, again avoiding conversion terminology.

Tenses (1965, *Egyptian Tenses* — the structural formulation of Polotsky’s

³ Cf. Eric Hamp’s important if little known article of, “Inordinate Clauses in Celtic”, a non-generative contribution to the generative collection C. Corum *et al.* (eds.), *You Take the High Node and I’ll Take the Low Node: Papers from the Comparative Syntax Festival* (Chicago 1973) 229-251.

view of the ME tense system, in many ways recalling “the Coptic Conjugation System”). Methodologically relevant here is Polotsky’s fierce rejection of “virtual” as attribute of a syntactic role. He quotes for “virtual” the OED (“in effect though not formally or explicitly”) and Gardiner’s *Egyptian Grammar* §182 (“a subordinate clause has nothing to distinguish it from a complete sentence except its meaning and its syntactic function” (! — A.S.-H.). Polotsky: “As regards criteria for recognizing ‘syntactic function’, it is hardly correct to represent matters as if there were only the two opposite extremes, viz. ‘mere logical points of view’ on the one side and ‘distinctive formal features’ on the other, especially if the latter expression is too narrowly understood as applying only to positive signs of subordination. The possibilities of “Parataxis” (in the sense of ‘konjunktionslose Hypotaxe’) are many and subtle” (p. 7). This criticism can, I believe, only be taken as expanding, enriching and refining the conception of “formal feature”. As a case in point, clauses of circumstance are detected in — and co-define — “adverbial substitution-tables”. Initiality is for the first time used as a formal feature in Egyptian syntax: a major breakthrough, later to be the basis of the Late Egyptian “Non-Initial Main Clause”.

Coptic (1971, Polotsky’s little known, brief typological sketch of “Coptic” in *Current Trends in Linguistics*) curiously refrains from referring to “conversion” and “converters” at all. The existence of this feature is no more than obscurely hinted at (p.566): “...some of the remaining real tenses are merely modifications, characterized by identical, or at least similar, morphemes common to all or most basic tenses”.

Notre connaissance (1972, Polotsky’s second and last paper on Late Egyptian paper): the so-called emphatic forms (*j.jr.f.sdm*) are “des formes conjonctionnelles (‘daß-Formen’) ... proches parentes des formes relatives, toutes deux ayant en commun la particularité d’être à la fois et nominalisées et personnelles” (137). We have here exactly the same description and terminology as in 1940.

Transpositions (1976) is an explicitly transformationalist, Parts-of-Speech-oriented reworking of the *Egyptian Tenses* and a prefiguration of Polotsky’s last work, the *Grundlagen* (which in its original form, conceived and written in the late Sixties and early seventies, also contained a research account of pre-Coptic Egyptian). The three non-verbal word-classes have here each their verbal derivates: “le verbe *a besoin de pouvoir s’exprimer* substantivement adjectivement et adverbialment” (p.2) is strangely phrased, and a *petitio principii*. The use of “transposition” and “transponent” heralds the *Grundlagen*; yet note the simultaneous preservation of the old non-transpositional traditional “relative” and “circumstantial” forms.

Cleft Sentence (1985, on the Cleft Sentence in Tigrinya), à propos “subordination by” *zə-*: “just as a subordinated (“relativiertes”) Gerund is practically unthinkable, so it is most unusual, to say the least, for an *independent, finite*, tense to be excluded from subordination”. This almost explicitly addresses an issue never

really tackled in Coptic: the *categorial incidence* of conversion, as detected by (non-) convertibility: the case of $\epsilon\epsilon\epsilon\omega\tau\lambda$, the Clause Conjugations, certain conjugation forms (like $\psi\delta\psi$ -) that have reduced convertibility. A related issue concerns the properties and roles of converted forms, as contrasted with unconverted ones, e.g. in details of *Tempuslehre*. As will be stressed below, “independent” is objectionable since it is always a relative, never absolute quality; moreover, it begs the question of the syntactic status of *modal* verb forms.

Neusyrische Konjugation (1984-6): (on $-v\delta$) — practically the same as 1961: clause forms are “in die Vergangenheit versetzt” by $-v\delta$. The aorist *ki-*, future *bit-*, preterit *qām-* too, get the same description as in the earlier accounts.

Grundlagen (1987-90, Polotsky’s major summing-up work on Coptic clause types; in the making since the early Nineteen-Seventies): “Konversion oder Transposition”...“dass Sätze aller Typen durch verschiedene grammatische Mittel in eine der drei *nicht-verbale* Wortklassen: Substantiv, Adjektiv, Adverb überführt werden”... “*der ursprüngliche Satz* wird so zu einem eingegliederten Satzteil, einem Satzglied substantivischer, adjektivischer, adverbialer *Bedeutung*”. “Word Classes” clearly correspond to an essential reduced scheme of the *partes orationis*: the circumstantial is an “adverbiale Transposition” (Umstandssatz, Zustandssatz); “substantivische Transposition” applies to the Second Tense (which as a matter of fact has no substantival slotting since Late Egyptian). The odd one out is now $\mu\epsilon$ - (1987 p.3), not assignable to any Part of Speech : “Die Präteritale Transposition betrifft weder Wortklassen noch Gliedsätze, sondern verschiebt Vollsätze in die relative Vergangenheit... Es war ein Fehler meines “conjugation System” §18, ihr die erste Stelle unter den Transpositionen anzuweisen”. Conversion has reached its final phase: converters must coincide with specific Parts of Speech in order to qualify, and must be “transposed” from a basic tense — the ideal “verbal” verb clause that is primary and “original”. The Preterite converter, be it first or last of the set, contradicts itself. The description must reject facts: the model is forced on grammatical reality.⁴

1993 (“Incorporation in Modern Syriac”, published posthumously in *Semitic and Cushitic Studies*, delivered in 1990) still refrains from using “converter” for *ki-*, *bit-*, *qām-* which still are “prefixes”.

3 The Coptic Conjugation System (1960), and After.

“Converter” and roles of Conversion

For Coptic and Demotic, four converter roles have been defined: focalization (the Second Tense or Focalizing Conversion), narrative *relief* (the Preterite Converter), adnominal status (the Relative Conversion), adverbialization+adnexal status (the “Circumstantial” Conversion); this means they fall into two subcategories, one

⁴ This is the second instance in Polotsky’s work of “Systeme die wir bilden um sie in die Dinge hineinzulegen” (Schuchardt), imposed at the cost of the intelligibility of grammatical phenomena; the first is the original theory of the Second Tenses (as presented in the *Études*), condemning the non-adverbial foci to the limbo of “*emplois abusifs*”, secondary and marginal.

discourse-referred, the other constituent-referred. Polotsky's Coptic Conjugation System terminology is now more or less conventional in Coptic linguistics. While the Circumstantial and to a degree Preterite converters are encountered in Late Egyptian (and so used by the Jerusalem school of Egyptian Linguistics and its adherents), the term has not been applied to earlier stages. As for other languages, I am so far aware only of the following applications:

Modern Greek: Barri *Aoristic Present* is the first and to date only appreciation of Polotsky's terminological usage (including his classroom use of Turkish *-se, -dik, -mis, -iken* as "converters"). Defined as "any device, syntactic ... or morphological ... effecting substantivization, adjectivization or adverbialization ...", it is extended to include "the formants of verbal nouns, verbal adjectives or gerunds of all kind (i.e. not only finite forms. A.S.-H.). The Coptic 'clause conjugations' [Polotsky] now considers as 'converted tenses' too." Among Modern Greek converters are the Circumstantials (ἄμα, ὥς, ὅσο, πρίν...) Conditional (ἄν), Relative (ὅπου, πού, ὅσο.), Substantivizer (μή), Subordinator (νά), Concessive (ἄς) Negator (μή), Future (θά).⁵ The overlapping with the conjunction repertory is striking: another weighty double issue, that of how are (a) converters and the traditional conjunctions related, (b) conjunctions (συνδεσμοί) and subordination related.

Welsh (Middle and Modern): Shisha-Halevy *Converter Systems, Structural Studies, Noun Predication Patterns* : negation (unmarked), interrogation/allocution, response (specific, marked negation); relative (adjectivization), substantivization (specific marked negation). I would define the converters as segmental, syntagm-, text-, cotext- or discourse-role elements that (a) do not join in nexus. (b) Effect the whole nexus, not a part thereof. (c) In principle, join all or many or several nexus types (with some exceptions that are historically explicable); they are excluded from nexus forms that are otherwise marked for syntactic integration (in Coptic, the so-called Clause Conjugation forms.) (d) Typically form close juncture with their nexus. (e) Mark adnominal or adverbial or discourse status.

Old Nubian: Gerald Browne (oral communication) "The Old Nubian verbal system operates on the principle of predicate accretion. The basic verbal units, the verbid and the subjunctive (of which the former marks tense, the latter tense, person and number) are *converted to main-clause status* through suffixation of the predicate marker *-a*, and we thereby obtain the predicative and the indicative, respectively; e.g (from *pes-* 'to speak') present verbid *pesil* + *-a* > present predicative *pesira* (with syllable-closing /l/ becoming /r/ when syllable-opening) and present subjunctive 3rd sg. *pesin* + *-a* > present indicative 3rd sg. *pesina*. These formations in turn may be periphrastically expanded through juncture with the predicate-marking verb *ein-* 'to be'; e.g. verbid periphrastic *pesil einna*, predicative periphrastic

⁵ H. B. Rosén's periphrastic Greek "Zweite Tempora" (εἶμι ποιῶν, in Herodotean and New Testament Greek), see *Museum Helveticum* 14 (1957) and *BSL* 62/1 (1967), are not converted in any sense: the auxiliary tense is still the tense of the whole periphrasis, and the participle marks and carries the thematic or topicalizing role for the whole.

pesira einna, and indicative periphrastic *pesina einna* (all ‘emphatic’ variants of the indicative *pesina*)”.⁶

Needless to say, “conversion” has long been in common use for the “morphological process” that derives forms from forms of a different class or category (so Huddleston *Introduction* e.g. p. 23f.), and was so terminologically used, in the analysis of word-formation, long before Polotsky’s “Coptic Conjugation System”; but note (a) that here it is much easier to find conversion postulated than to isolate converters, (b) that for this kind of conversion a specific *direction* is always maintained: I shall take up this last point further below; (c) that this approach to conversion does away with the signalling environment and, consequently, the *value system* of the elements in point.⁷

Different yet comparable terms are encountered, such as “translatif” (following Tesnière) for Syriac *d*-⁸ (Wertheimer *Syriac Particle*: “a marker of various syntactic operations”, with a focus on “transferring a word from one grammatical category to another”). The non-specific term “particle” often serves to cover also true converters.⁹

But let us now return to the question of subordination. It is obvious that the functional range of conversion, as variously conceived of, is much broader than that of traditional subordination; and sometimes (in the case of “future transposition” by *qav*, or negators) induces us to accept a textual functional level for features traditionally considered only in clause- or even word-scope.

4 Egyptian Converters

Although the term “converter” is by now in use for pre-Coptic Egyptian, from Late Egyptian on (so for example in Vernus *L’égypcio-copte*), conversion as a concept has hardly been deliberated on diachronically. Two queries are here of immediate interest: (a) the source or origin of the individual converters of later Egyptian; (b) the relative chronology of converter evolution. Let me begin, however, with three brief theoretical observations or reminders that I believe are pertinent. First, that synchrony is no more “real” (that is, no less an idealizing model) than diachrony, with postulated hierarchies, types and scales of dynamicity and interdependencies, and different measures of synthesis replacing the chronological

⁶ In Amharic, the auxiliary verb *ala* and other auxiliaries act similarly to Nubian *-a*, e.g. following the gerund. This suffixation of an element that turns a verbal element that in itself does not form a nexus into an autonomous nexus, occurs in other African languages of the region, such as Somali; the OE/ME *ju* — an auxiliary in itself, mentioned above on several occasions — has a similar role.

⁷ Huddleston *Introduction* (p.95) “*ups* and *downs* are clearly forms of the noun lexemes *up* and *down*, whose lexical stems are derived by conversion from the adverb stems *up* and *down*... (p.107) it is conversion, not syncretism, that yields pairs of phonologically and orthographically identical word belonging to different parts of speech...”

⁸ Modern Irish *go-*, substantivizing nexus pattern, adverbializing adjectives, adjectivizing substantives and marking predicative status of adjectives is strikingly comparable.

⁹ So for instance for Berber (e.g. *is-*, *ur-*, *ad-*): see Galand *Le Berbère* 227f.

dynamism of diachrony. Second, that there does exist a kind of synchronic dynamism relevant to the issue under consideration, namely the junctural one, which constantly and cumulatively develops in the text: see below. Third — and this is or ought to be commonplace — the “continuity fallacy” must be taken into account: no one written phase of Egyptian originated in or derives from the preceding written phase, and the true continuities — of local spoken linguistic varieties — are hidden from us. This realized, we see that almost every converter emerges or “starts” at the beginning of a new phase.

(a) Of the four Coptic converters, two were at some phase active verbal auxiliaries; one a relative adjective turned relative pronoun; the origins of one (the circumstantial *e-* from *jw*) are lost in the fogs of time. The striking synchronic morphosyntactic affinity of Coptic converters to the *conjugation bases*, nuclear conjugation carriers themselves structurally “pro-verbs” or auxiliaries (at least one, namely the Optative or Third Future base, evolved early from a morph which may at least partly be considered a converter, namely the “nynegocentric” *hic-et-nunc* marker¹⁰ *jw*) must be pointed out in this connection. Many conjugation bases are convertible; those that are not (“Clause Conjugations”) are historically old prepositional combinations with nominalized nexal forms.

(b) Only the circumstantial *jw* reveals full converter-hood throughout Egyptian diachrony, and now seen to be in evidence since Old Egyptian: in fact, it is never really attested as non-converter, or as part of a conjugation form. The relative has not yet reached full converterhood even in Coptic (witness $\pi\rho\omega\mu\epsilon \epsilon\tau\sigma\omega\tau\mu$, with $\epsilon\tau$ - occupying the slot of a theme pronouns, that is, a constituent part of the nexus and thus not a converter). The Focalizing Conversion, alias Second Tense, is not yet a full converter in Demotic, perhaps with traces of a similar status even in Coptic (is $\epsilon\varphi\sigma\omega\tau\mu / \delta\varphi\sigma\omega\tau\mu$ etc. still an “*j.jr.f sdm*” emphatic form, homonymous with the Focalizing Present?). The enigmatically spelled (*wn-n3w-*) Preterite Converter already has (at least partially) converter status in LE. In ME, a phase of Egyptian special in so many ways, the non-circumstantial *jw* prefixed to the adverb-rheme nexus (Polotsky *Tenses* §35, following Gunn’s *Studies in Egyptian Syntax* p. 20) is arguably a discourse-function converter; “relating the statement to the sphere of interest and to the time of the speaker”. It is not at all attested in later phases of the language, except as conjugation base: indeed, this is the only instance of converter-turned-base, unless we consider *hr-* in the still mysterious *hr-ir.f sdm* (Ⲭⲓⲣⲓⲣⲓⲥⲟⲩⲙ).

(c) The main systemic significance of conversion lies of course in the converters constituting categories that elegantly transect most nexal patterns, typologically indicative of the grammemic exponence of grammatical relations — microsyntactic (attribution and adnexal junction) and macrosyntactic (discourse-function relations).

¹⁰ Whether it is or was in itself a substantive or (with its following pronoun or substantive) a substantival verb-form, its high grammaticalization and occurrence immediately prefixed to the nexal pattern appears to qualify it as a synchronic converter.

5 Zero converter

Polotsky points out (*Tenses* §15) the case of “subordination being effected by negative means, viz. by the absence of positive morphological elements characterizing syntactic independence”. In 1969 (review article of Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik*), Polotsky explicitly defines the absence of OE/ME *iw* as “Null”, which was also his classroom formulation (yet he never to my knowledge considered this *iw*, or for that matter the circumstantial *iw* of ME, as converters. The “*nunegocentric*” marker *iw*, even if originally and perhaps to an extent synchronically substantival, may still be considered a likely candidate for converterhood); zero conversion of the adverb-rheme nexus in ME effects inclusion, exclamation, modality, consequence. Much later, Polotsky almost totally eliminated “significant absence” morphs from his analysis, the most striking symptom of his slipping into non-structural analytic procedure.¹¹

In the case of the Coptic Base (“Tripartite”) Conjugation, the absence of conversion before the base may in strict structural analysis be seen as significant — zero conversion, significant absence of conversion, but only within the boundaries of a precise scope: $\epsilon\eta\tau\alpha\varphi\text{-}\alpha\sigma\omega\ \epsilon\eta\tau\alpha\varphi\text{-}$ is formally and functionally opposed to $\epsilon\eta\tau\alpha\varphi\text{-}\alpha\sigma\omega\ \epsilon\alpha\varphi\text{-}$ and to $\epsilon\eta\tau\alpha\varphi\text{-}\alpha\sigma\omega\ \emptyset\text{-}\alpha\varphi\text{-}$. (This formulation, also true for the existential $\sigma\sigma\eta\text{-}/\mu\mu\eta\text{-}$ is even more complicated, in the formal aspect, in the case of the Durative Nexus pattern). Otherwise, converted forms are related to unconverted ones as (respectively) marked to unmarked terms of an opposition.

6 *Tempusübergang and subordination; conversion and juncture*

The syntactic-junctural significance of Harald Weinrich’s *relief* role of the Greco-Romance Imperfect, or indeed of any narrative-function roles of *marked* narrative tenses, is (as is explicitly pointed out in *Tempus*) in the boundary or seam separating one tense or tense-sequence from another. Moreover, the marked tense, breaking the concatenation of the (unmarked) main narrative carrier tense, may (Harald Weinrich again, in what is one of the most brilliant insights of his seminal work) be considered the text-grammatical equivalent of the sentence-grammatical subordination. So too Polotsky 1965: §13 “a relative tense as such is no less subordinate to *some neighbouring verb-form* than a conjunction would make it”. Now this formulation raises an interesting theoretical issue, namely the incidence of the “relative tense” (or, more generally, of any sequence-breaking tense): is it in point of fact *individually* subordinate to a “neighbouring” (i.e. immediately preceding? immediately following?) verb-form or verb clause,¹² or is its signalling occurrence rather one activation of a *potential text-scope channel* that is

¹¹ See Shisha-Halevy *Converter Systems* §§3.2, 3.3.2-3 for zero conversion of the Welsh finite verb. In dialogue, *zero* marks the responsive: *A weli ...? — Gwelaf* “Do you see...? — I see (I do)”. In narrative, *zero* with the Preterite is opposed to the focussing *fe-* and interlocutive-perspective *mi-*.

¹² Note that the Coptic “Imperfect” $\eta\alpha\varphi\omega\tau\mu$ is (at least in some corpora studied) textually equivalent to — i.e. macrosyntactically commutable with — the circumstantial present $\epsilon\varphi\omega\tau\mu$.

hierarchically “subordinate” to the main narrative-evolution carrier channel?

Another query of significance concerns the junctural aspect of conversion. The Coptic converters are links and delimiters, of several orders and different grades. For example, the Relative and adnominal Circumstantial of respectively higher and lower linkage, lower and higher delimitation, characterizing the inner boundary in the #nucleus + expansion# pattern; the Focalizing Conversion marks a sharp initial delimitation of its construction, with thematic linkage following it; $\pi\epsilon\varphi$ - in $\pi\epsilon\varphi\omega\tau\mu$ $\pi\epsilon$ is of a much higher delimitation in narrative texture than $\pi\epsilon\varphi$ - alone, which, however, in the slot following $\delta\varphi$ -, is of higher delimitation than $\delta\varphi$ -.

7 Clause autonomy. The Egyptian “Non-Initial Main Clause”

The apodotic $\epsilon\varphi\omega\tau\mu$ (in Coptic), the narrative *ju.f hr sdm* (in LE), perhaps the continuative *sdm.n.f* in ME, are all cases of verb-clause forms that are, not only retrodependent, but also “lock into place” with specific forms that precede them, combining with them into well-demarcated clause-complex units. The familiar Egyptian “Non-Initial Main Clause” (S. Groll) wants precise definition in both its constituents: (non-) initiality is relative, and “main clause” in the case in point stems beyond doubt from an ethnocentric or translation-based approach, since concepts like “autonomy”, “independence” and the like are always relative when applied to subtextual unities. At any rate, formally characterized sequential or sequelling forms or clauses are no less “ordinated” or indeed “included” than are the traditional *Teilsätze*. The same obtains for inversion-marked clauses in some (notably West European) languages; and “mobile” markers of subtextual retro- and inter-dependence, namely so-called Sentence Particles, made to be installed in otherwise unmarked clauses. Many of these markers are likely candidates for converter status.

8 Converters, the Parts-of-Speech model and grammatical verb categories

As has been pointed out above, there is drastic change in Polotsky’s work between the epochmaking Coptic Conjugation System 1960 (CCS), which is still in no way biased by the *a priori*, pre-analytic Part of Speech model, and therefore is so powerfully cogent, and the very late *Grundlagen* (1987/90), which embraces almost a childhood axiomatic picture of the “pure” verb base surrounded by three Parts-of-Speech “Wortklassen” derivatives of three types, following K. F. Becker and others (the thirties of the 19th century). In ME (but not in other phases), “the verb” is hardly ever encountered “in a free state”: only the three transformations occur, in or outside periphrastic patterns. A similar theory is offered for Coptic in the *Grundlagen*, of forms transposed by mean of converters.

This is, frankly — and expectedly, the weakest link in Polotsky’s model, the one that is most open to claims of dogmatism and indeed that has been and is currently being challenged. The heart of the problem, even beyond the fundamental theoretical difficulties of the Parts-of-Speech model in itself, lies in the individual word-classes, which are all flawed or questionable or problematic:

the adverbial transposition is predictably the hardest to defend, and is no stronger than the “adverb” part of speech itself, which is notoriously fuzzy and almost fades away under a searching gaze; it is as a matter of fact a non-word-class — a mixed bag of adverbial, adverbial, ad-clausal, focalizing elements, and so on.

The adjective does not exist as a strict word-class for almost half the time-span of Egyptian. Moreover, the relative conversion does not expand a noun, but a definite determinator or demonstrative pronoun .

The substantival status does not apply to the Second Tenses already from LE on — indeed, it is fully proven to be valid only in ME.

A point to remember in this context is the special “Egyptian condition”: no vocalic morphology, little consonantal verbal morphology is available. Polotsky (notably in *Tenses*) challenged the accepted conception of grammatical category, conceiving of it as a word-class especially defined by syntactic slot. But he did not extend the pattern boundaries far enough, nor refine the paradigmatic / syntagmatic analysis sufficiently: a form evidently substantival in many — or most — slots may be adverbial in others (witness the circumstantial prospective, i.e. final *s_{dm} .f*, or the so-called *casus adverbialis*). The miscomprehension by some present-day Egyptologists of the nature and claims of this structural analysis, and apparently of the basics of *valeur* and of *significant/signifié* duality has led to a certain regrettable publication¹³ putting in question not only H. J. Polotsky’s findings and method (which is of course fully legitimate) but even his scholarly integrity.

9 Conversion, direction, and dynamicity: an alternative view

Terminology implying or connoting a dynamic sequence, such as “Versetzung” (shifting) (“into the past” — of Neo-Syriac *-və*, Coptic *νε-*), “transposition”, even “conversion” itself — carries with it, as it were by valency, the idea and implications of the synchronic manipulation and evolution (a contradiction in terms) of elements, and thereby violates both the *signalling* conception of linguistic signs and the paradigmatic (opposite) dimension of linguistic value, which is purely relational, with no process involved. Moreover, such dynamism forces decision on *direction of conversion* — from the basic form (so already in Polotsky *Conjugation System*, with “Basic Tenses” being the unconverted ones) to the derived one — a direction that cannot always be confidently or objectively established or defended, and which is more often than not circular and tautological.¹⁴ Following direction, a *hierarchy* is implied or ... — “verb primary, noun secondary” that can only obfuscate the description.

¹³ See Satzinger and Shisha-Halevy, *Snark*.

¹⁴ Huddleston *Introduction* p.23f. “We will make the decision” (i.e. “which is the original stem and which the derived”) on the basis of meaning. Thus we take the noun *bottle* as primary and the verb as derived because it is the meaning of the noun that is basic... Conversely, *catch* is primarily a verb, secondarily a noun. But in between these clear extremes, there may be a small area of fuzziness.” I would vigorously take exception to the adjectives “clear” and “small” in these statements.

A general analytic alternative, which I believe is preferable by far, would be considering conversion, after a characterization of formal and functional *textual markedness* (the converted forms being marked, the unconverted unmarked), as a double-parameter feature of variable higher-rank *junctional* quantity with joint variable lower-rank *categorial* quality. For a kind of dynamicity does have its place in the textual scope.¹⁵ The decoding analysis (by the reader or listener), which takes place continually at text-level, is linear and cumulative. All structuration is dynamic and ever-changing, as further signals are transmitted and received, resolved, identified and valued. Moreover, any element simultaneously “belongs” — stands in association with — several other co-elements, and is indeed involved in several kinds of relationship (‘functions’, in the glossematic terminological sense): for a typical instance, internally inside a group and externally to elements outside it, or even outside the text, to other texts and the pragmatic context. Units do not exist absolutely and pre-analytically, which is why “sentences” and “clauses” as well as “words”, not to mention the “levels” such as morphology and syntax are never empirically valid grammatical (as distinct from ‘logical’, i.e. extra-linguistic, superimposed and always suspect) notions. Valid are instead “linked units of commutation in dialogue”, such as allocutions and responses, or “concatenation units in narrative” such as narrative Evolution Mode events, with their expansions and combinations. Inter-element associatedness is continually signalled and reported in real textual time as a textual base for retrospection and anaphora is accumulated, whereas for the prospective cotext, yet to come, expectations are manipulated, modified, satisfied or disappointed, and the already realized text reappraised accordingly. The text itself is delimited too, articulated and “chunked” dynamically. All this must be the first realization in the cohesive view of the textual ‘world’.

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¹⁵ In the following passage I quote myself (Shisha-Halevy, *Juncture Features*).

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