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H.J. Polotsky Structuralist

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One hundred years after the birth of our Master and fourteen years after his sudden death, in the peak of his research activity, the scholarly world of linguistics is, both essentially and technically, very different from, and probably less attractive than the one he knew and worked in. Still, not one of the peculiarities of modern scholarship was unheralded or indeed unknown when he was still alive. We, his disciples, frequently wonder, sadly, as to what would his reaction and opinion have been: very probably dry and sarcastic, delivered with a quizzical smile, but never egocentric or self-involving. We would dearly like to have his comments on many new grammatically baffling *loci* in Coptic, Egyptian, Amharic, Neo-Aramaic – he would have commented on those with relish, a trenchant lucidity and, again, a wonderful humility in face of language and the text: “trust the text, not your own ideas and bias” was ever his guiding principle. This, and absence of overweening confidence in his ability to fathom the depths of linguistic systems: Polotsky was a scholar of great humility in the presence of linguistic intricacy.

More than a decade after Polotsky’s death, I believe a first theoretical and methodological appreciation of his lifework is due. The present essay, a reflective, occasionally reminiscent personal ramble, is meant to contribute preliminaries to a chapter or a paragraph in a rough copy of the Egyptian-Coptic component in such a work.¹ However, since the same decade-and-a half has seen Polotsky’s heritage subjected to fierce critical revisionism – indeed, with occasional vitriolic and even visceral hostility (the iconoclastic vehemence of which criticism can never discount his research or devalue his findings)² – as Polotsky’s disciple, and as Polotsky’s nominal successor in Coptic and Egyptian linguistics in Jerusalem, I feel by duty bound to address some issues in his work on Egyptian that have been criticized. I suggest that Polotsky’s modern critics often misunderstand, or half-understand, or do not understand at all, the special, personal structuralist model and concept underlying Polotsky’s method, and/or Polotsky’s application thereof. In the short time at my disposal I can barely skim Polotsky’s opus, and focussing on Egyptian-Coptic will inevitably make my observations lopsided. His careful and lengthy, perfectionist consideration in choice of wording, phrasing, and formulation, his condensed style (he is always lucid and never obscure, but sometimes hermetic) are also related to his stand-taking on matters of theory. I cannot dwell here on the

* As H.J. Polotsky’s personal successor for Coptic Linguistics at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem Ariel Shisha-Halevy was invited to give the conference’s opening lecture on Sept 9th in Bad Honnef near Bonn. Thus he presents a “Rückblick” on the Master’s person and work. For the exact citations of works by H.J. Polotsky mentioned in this essay see: Hans Jakob Polotsky, *Collected Papers*, Jerusalem 1971 and Verena M. Lepper & Leo Depuydt (eds.), *H. J. Polotsky. Scripta Posteriora on Egyptian and Coptic (1968-1991)*, *Lingua Aegyptia. Studia monographica* 7, Göttingen 2007 [Comment of the Editor].

1 Cf. also Ariel Shisha-Halevy, On Conversion, Clause Ordination and Related Notions, in: G. Goldenberg & Ariel Shisha-Halevy (ed.), *Proceedings, Ancient Egyptian, Neo-Semitic - Methods in Linguistics: Workshop in Memory of H.J. Polotsky*, Israel Academy of Sciences, Jerusalem 2006, 92-105.

2 Cf. Helmut Satzinger & Ariel Shisha-Halevy, The Snark is Dead, in: *Lingua Aegyptia* 6 (1999), 167-176.

fine nuances and numerous distinctions of the descriptive structuralist models, which flourished in the years between the great wars and until the late Fifties of the last century, lingered on until the Seventies and still survive in the specific disciplines of language description, often sheltering under the philological components of the great frameworks of Classical Studies, Romance Studies, Germanic Studies and similar disciplinary clusters, but (outside Jerusalem) hardly as special academic entities.

I find a remarkable series of similarities between H. J. Polotsky and Ferdinand de Saussure, of which two seem crucial: neither advocated or even tolerated the canonization or codification of his teaching – Polotsky was sarcastic, even downright resented the presentation of his description of the ME verb as “Standard Theory”. Both applied their theories, put them to the test, so to speak tried them out, in classroom dialogue on the text-based descriptive analysis of language: for both, this classroom forum was more important than the published one. Both chose not to formulate publicly their general linguistic *Weltanschauung*, but were eloquent about method and theory in class: in fact, for both, published work was no more than the tip of their intellectual iceberg of research and classroom reading and discussion. Both were fiercely criticized by scholars who misunderstood or misrepresented their views. For both Saussure and Polotsky, the crucial points of theory and the main insights are often elusive and more sophisticated than is generally realized. In Polotsky’s “*lustrum mirabile*”, between the Coptic Conjugation System of 1960 and “Egyptian Tenses” (1965), through his “Koptische Wortstellung” and “Nominalsatz und Cleft Sentence”, with “*Syntaxe amharique et syntax turque*”, his sense of system is coupled with a breathtaking grasp of syntax; and these are, I believe, the studies that crown his structuralist years, properly begun in the Forties. The clear symptoms of this approach are issues and statements of distribution **in the text**, commutation **in textual slots**, and patterns, of which more later.

Now Polotsky did not write or teach as a linguistic theorist or general linguist (his only nominally general course to my knowledge was “General Syntax”, offered in 1964/5, really a comparative study of phenomena of synchronic and diachronic grammar, such as “that” forms, the actor of infinitives, the Cleft Sentence and tense systems). Nor did he use tell-tale phraseology, at least not frequently.³ Indeed, he was wary, and often warned his students, of the filtering of “language reality” by the various methodologies. Polotsky’s descriptive work on any single language was usually carried out, and understandable only, in the context of several other languages, with a group of classical, European and some Semitic languages, as well as Turkish, a basic core source of grammatical phenomena, and more esoteric languages used as referents for special features. Still, other languages are never used as argument, but only as guides for the typologically possible, probable and extant. A striking example, especially relevant to the revisionist drive mentioned above, are the converbs (*alias* – and less felicitously – “gerunds” or – still worse – “adverbial participles”), adverbial verb forms so important in Altaic and Ethiopian, and incidentally also in Egyptian Coptic and in Celtic. Yet another example is his comparative classroom discussion, mostly unpublished, of the syntactic functions signalled by the presence and absence of “copula-like” elements (thus Middle Egyptian *jw-*, Turkish *-dir* etc.). This monolithic yet multi-language system of analytic study makes an appreciation of Polotsky’s method for a single language extremely difficult, and judgement on the basis of a single language inevitably lopsided and distorted.

³ The *Coptic Conjugation System* and the *Egyptian Tenses* are exceptions. Beside “zero” as in zero morph, elsewhere zero vowel and zero article, we encounter “negative formal feature” (ET p.7), “the function of grammatical distinctiveness is vested in a different constituent element” (CCS §2).

Polotsky was extremely self-critical, no less than obsessive about his published statements; he spent years formulating and reformulating them, and was certainly aware of any shortcomings in his presentation, and of those problematic nodes pounced upon and held up gleefully by present-day scholars as instances of error or worse. Polotsky was all too conscious of problematic implications of his views, as of the difficulty of some linguistic quandaries, but was uncannily successful in not letting theoretical issues distract him from his empirical inquiry.

Changes of methodological approach in Polotsky's more than half-a-century's descriptive output are observable, as are differences of focus, but by and large the same analytic theoretical orientation is upheld. (It is in this connection important to realize that the *Grundlagen*, of which the second volume was published a year before Polotsky's death, is not a summation of his work, but a late, expanded part publication of a comprehensive work conceived and first written in the mid-seventies, then, largely because Mouton Publishers went bankrupt, shelved for decades. In fact, the "Transpositions du verbe en égyptien classique" of 1976 was originally the Egyptian part of the same work). In the *Grundlagen* and the Transpositions, a different, **synthesizing** approach comes to light, one that occurs (though to a lesser extent) also in studies of other languages, and one that exacts the price – for me, heavy – of abandoning the pure structural, sophisticated Saussurean and Hjelmselevian web of relations for an incomparably more naive device of derivation and hierarchical dynamism.

Signifiant and signifié

The prime principle of expression vs. content – "formal distinction – functional distinction" – is uncompromisingly observed, in an almost religious commitment, in Polotsky's work: every formal feature that is not environmentally conditioned has its own distinct function. This, with the corresponding close reading of the text, has early earned Polotsky the rebuke of the advocates of "adequacy" in linguistic attention (see p.195 in W. Helck's *Ägyptologie an deutschen Universitäten*, Wiesbaden 1969), and is still all too often neglected in actual Egyptological and Coptological practice. Needless to say, the postulation of functional differences – say, tense or mode or that range of semantic features too often light-handedly described as "verbal aspect" – is unsound, unless it can be correlated with formal distinction. Since it is often difficult, sometimes very difficult, often seemingly impossible to achieve this correlation, it calls for what I would describe as the patience of humility, refraining from proceeding light-handedly to complete a "système de grammaire", while ignoring elements and signals whose functions are as yet obscure.

It is, in fact, this primary quest – isolating the roles of formal differences – that constitutes the core of the linguist's task. Polotsky, always conscious of the limitations and the relativity of our heuristic tools, was, from the *Études de syntaxe copte* on, wary and sceptical of the function-first approach, tempting and ever ethnocentrically attractive.

Commutation, paradigmatics

There is a drastic difference and volte-face observable between the approach leading to identification of Coptic *ne-* as converter (in fact, the first one!) on the structural commutation basis (*Coptic Conjugation System*, 1960, §§ 10-18) and that resulting in the denial of converter status for this element (1987, *Grundlagen des koptischen Satzbaues I*, p. 3), on the

implied ground of its not corresponding to any part of speech. This difference corresponds in fact to the evolution in Polotsky's work from the high analyticity of the nineteen-sixties to the synthetic a-priori systematization of the verb characterizing the two subsequent decades, to which a transformational dynamicity – an underlying “basic” nexus is shifted (morphologically converted) to one of the three non-verbal parts of speech – is a companion quality. The Coptic conjugation forms, a brilliant bypass to the compounded difficulties of the verbal-*vs.*-non-verbal-nexus Scylla and word-*vs.*-clause Charybdis, are defined as patterns and characterized syntagmatically-and-paradigmatically.⁴ In Coptic, the commutation environment never exceeds for Polotsky the clausal extent, which, as a symptom of “morphological” inertia, impairs the analysis and undermines the entire categorial structure. Not so in the *Egyptian Tenses* (1965), which offers a “Conjugation System” for Middle Egyptian: here the analysis is macrosyntactic, of necessity, since the usual ethnocentric unities of “word” and “clause” are not obvious in the Egyptian text. However, to the *Egyptian Tenses* corresponds the “Transpositions du verbe en égyptien classique” (1976), a part-of-speech systematisation for the Middle Egyptian verb heralding the *Grundlagen*, although, owing to the typological differences between these two phases of the language, the earlier schematisation is in part analytic, much cleaner and less forced, therefore more convincing, than the later one: the distinction and occasional opposition between the “adjectival” and the “substantival” *mrr.f* forms are real, in terms of syntactic environment.

The hub of the *Egyptian Tenses*, a development of the second of the *Études de syntaxe copte* of 1944 and the “Emphatic *sdm.n.f*” of 1957, both quintessentially structuralist in analytic method, is no doubt the pan-chronic Egyptian nexal pattern consisting of the juxtaposition of a (thematic) noun and (rhematic) adverb(ial), in which template most of Middle Egyptian verb clauses and periphrastic constructions, it is suggested, are moulded. The two flanking paradigms here are crucial to Polotsky's view of the predicative verbal system. But these paradigms are *never contemplated apart from their syntagmatic environment*: on this further below.

Category: homonymy and identity

This primary structural feature of Polotsky's method is striking, especially for the Middle Egyptian (and to an extent Old Egyptian) verbal system, but also for Coptic conjugation. The verbal category in Middle Egyptian is resolved and set, virtually free from morphological form (although such consonantal morphology as is present is utilized). The point is that of **structural entity and identity** – the intersection point of the syntagmatic (constructional) and paradigmatic (commutational) axes or dimensions. Each and every element of language is caught and held in the systemic tension that is simultaneously paradigmatic and syntagmatic – and, furthermore, synchronic-in-diachrony (below). The linguistic signal and the valued linguistic sign are a three-dimensional complex, indeed, four-dimensional when we introduce the evolutionary factor signalling congregate or packet. This corrective analysis of Polotsky's is a striking instance of counteracting the “superstition de la forme” (De Boer)⁵. The “etymological” quality and identity of an element – say, of Egyptian *iw-* or of the *sdm.f*/*sdm.n.f* forms – was for him marginal, even relatively uninteresting. The analytic,

4 The Coptic Conjugation System (1960), e.g. §§ 3-5.

5 Charles de Boer, *Études de syntaxe française*, V: Facteurs troublants dans les études de syntaxe française, in: *Revue de Linguistique Romane* 4 (1928), 301-310.

periphrastic verbal form (from *jw.f sdm.f* to *h̄.n sdm.n.f* and so on) is no less “verbal” than the synthetic *sdm.f* and *sdm.n.f* forms. However, by applying, indeed celebrating the absolute overrule of morphology by syntax, Polotsky managed brilliantly to by-pass the pervasive verb-centered European typological linguistic model, a trap not easy to avoid, of casting languages in the image of our own, typically West European. (Indeed, the “normal” verb seems to be a psychological trope for linguistic familiarity. Ironically, Polotsky, who has devoted most of his efforts to elucidating the verb mechanism, has been accused of “deverbalizing” it in ME.)

In the *Coptic Conjugation System* and the *Grundlagen*, Polotsky adduces structural arguments for the distinct systemic nature of the verbal rheme of the Durative (“Bipartite”) Conjugation Pattern in Coptic, yet without going the last step of actually defining it as non-infinitival, as *converbal*. The distributional profile of this important element is elusive enough (in my opinion, due to the existence of an often homonymous non-durative generic present, where the signalled adverbial status of the verbal rheme – not commutable – is absent as well as to lexical quirks), but its distinctness is beyond doubt nonetheless: it is not an infinitive, but a converb. Here as elsewhere, Polotsky stops short of drawing the full conclusions from a structural configuration and analytic profile of an element, and lets “traditional”, usually a-priori and synthesizing, points of view prevail.

Patterning and the category

Here we have a key factor in Polotsky’s analytic procedure. The pattern – definable (not by Polotsky) as the matrix or template for a bounded sequence of paradigms, i.e. categories – epitomizes structural analysis no less than the category; the pattern is the basic complex signal, a term in the paradigmatic *système des valeurs*, coupled with the syntagmatic combinatory information. Thus, the pattern is in fact the building-stone of structural syntax, broadly conceived. In the continuous descending analysis of the text, it is the patterns, from more to less complex, that we isolate and identify. Macrosyntactic patterns make up the text in the higher-level articulations, and the nexal conjugation patterns, which mainly attracted Polotsky’s attention throughout his opus in all the languages he studied, emerge only lower down in the descending analysis.

Now a crucial matter is here at stake. Outside or apart from the pattern, Polotsky’s categorial forms – the suffix conjugation forms, the Stative, and so on – are meaningless or only partly meaningful, for it is the pattern that provides the environment for their paradigmatic definition. But Polotsky never meant these forms independently of the pattern, or of the syntagmatic axis in general. Thus, in the 1957 review of Till’s *Koptische Grammatik* (1st edition), Polotsky emphasizes that adverbial verb forms are meant “in the syntactic sense” (“im syntaktischen Sinne”). In the *Egyptian Tenses* (1965), the circumstantial (adverbial) forms are part and parcel of several various macrosyntactic or multinexal patterns, such as # ”find/see” + Object + [verb-form] #, or the narrative # {prt} pw jr.n {f} + [verb-form] #, or # {mrr.f} + [verb-form] #. In the §35 Polotsky discusses “the verbal partners of the adverbial predicate”; in the *Transpositions du verbe* of 1976, it is “prédictat adverbial deverbatif” (p.31), not “adverbe” that heads the sophisticated constituency table of the second position in the ME Bipartite pattern. But when, initially, he does speak of “formes nominales” and “formes adverbiales” (p.4), he makes it abundantly clear that here he associates this analysis with the old part-of-speech a-priori tradition, one which I personally

find unacceptably non-analytic. Thus, Polotsky's statement "le verbe a besoin de pouvoir s'exprimer substantivement, adjectivement et adverbialement" (*Transpositions du verbe*, p.2), while certainly elegant (always an important consideration in Polotsky's synthesizing drive), is *a priori* as well as non-analytic, and, I think, untenable. It is, I think, one of those cases of which Hugo Schuchardt warned, of "Systeme, die wir bilden, um sie in die Dinge hineinzulegen" as against "Systeme, die schon fertig in den Dingen liegen"⁶.

If I have belaboured this point, it is because it is topical and even urgent. Polotsky's ME "verb" is fully as descriptively meaningful and richly viable as are verbal forms in other well-studied languages; however, it certainly is *sui generis* typologically. (Moreover, to put it bluntly, any criticism of Polotsky's "unverbal" verbal system for ME must come to terms with languages (notably Altaic, Ethiopian and Celtic)⁷ in which adverbial verb-forms, converbs, are as important as or more important than infinitives in later Egyptian). Certain recent critical essays, criticizing Polotsky of having neglected so-called verbal attributes of the Middle Egyptian verb, no more than protest at his programmatically and consistently letting syntax overrule morphology. This is of course a long-standing and deeply rooted structuralist analytic principle: morphology is restricted to concern formal *signifiant* facts which do not have *signifié* consequences or environmental implications; all *signifié* or function factors have of necessity syntagmatic implications, hence are phenomena of "syntax", broadly conceived.

Method and the corpus

Example-hunting in the perusal of texts was Polotsky's principal research activity, with context information an essential configurational component of the evidence assembly of data, indeed an index part of the illustrative material. High sensitivity for nuances of meaning and environment and close reading of the text were de rigueur. Polotsky was fiercely opposed to synthetic fabricated texts (hence, with due reverence to his teachers, his condemnation of the immortal "der Bruder hört" – '*sḏm sn*'); this is of interest in an age where the corpus is being pompously rediscovered. But more than that: far more than attestation-hunting with contextual awareness: Polotsky's application of macro-syntax was sophisticated, even if methodologically unstated. Slots for paradigmatic resolution are textual, not clausal; and textemic scope (dialogue *vs.* narrative *vs.* report) is all-important.

When beset by theory-eager young students, Polotsky would counter criticism confessing himself a "pragmatist" in his choice of database, in programmatically blending periods, registers and in all probability dialects, to provide evidence for his subsystems; but not in his analytic method. Polotsky's methodological conduct was serious and consistent, but not zealous: to my knowledge, he never explicitly, let alone rhetorically, took a methodological stand. The provisional nature of the ensuing statements and schemes is always made clear, and so is their corpus validity.

Synchrony and diachrony

Here is another significant point of similarity between F. de Saussure's descriptive approach and that of H.J. Polotsky: both were synchronists, in the sense of their quest for the *système*

⁶ L. Spitzer, *Hugo-Schuchardt-Brevier*, Halle 1928, 411f.

⁷ To my knowledge it was H.J. Polotsky who introduced the term and notion of "converb" into Ethiopian linguistics (*Collected Papers*, Jerusalem 1971, 556f.).

des valeurs, yet for both the evolutionary picture was the real object of constant interest, so to speak the final goal. The interplay and the tension between language change and systemic relationship (“Innere Form”) is a constant theme in Polotsky’s work on Egyptian: consider the two studies in the *Études de syntaxe copte*, *ta-ref-* and the Second Tenses.

Striking showpieces in Egyptian for the complementarity of synchrony and diachrony as two dimensions or perspectives of a single phenomenon, of which the interaction yields a holographically whole picture which is arguably the only correct or true one are the Causative Conjugation set, e.g. the Coptic causative lexeme, *ta-ref-* and *tref-* and (on the earliest point of the evolution) the prospective *sḏm.f* of *jrj* governed by forms of *rdj*; or the {conjugation bases + actor} nuclear syntagmes as cases of grammaticalised *sḏm.f*. (The most striking insight provided by this joint perspective is, I believe, the case of the verb form predicated in the durative or Bipartite Pattern, the synchronic converb: here the diachronic identity constitutes the most instructive structural definition. As already mentioned, Polotsky himself pointed out the distinct identity of this element.) But the *locus classicus* revealing Polotsky’s approach is probably the Second Tenses (Focalising Conversion) phenomenon as presented in the *Études de syntaxe copte* and in subsequent discussions, with a relatively simple (if not unproblematic) core pattern evolving into a complicated plethora of patterns. For half a century, from the *Études* to the *Grundlagen*, Polotsky maintained the oldest Egyptian system as core and indeed as completely stable, treating all mutations in this system as divergences and marginal developments, not even ramifications of the “original” system. Three immediately conspicuous cases in point are the substantival, “that”-form status of the Focalising Conversion in Coptic, on which Polotsky insists throughout, the absence of conclusive evidence notwithstanding; the breaking of the # Topic + Focus # matrix, with initial foci prevalent, and of course the “autofocal” lexeme- or nexus-focalising roles of the Focalising Converter. The possibility of these existing in early and Late Egyptian was not contemplated by Polotsky, but their importance in Coptic (and probably in Demotic) is considerable, and may be seen as the main change of the focalisation system; in Polotsky’s accounts they are dismissed as unhistorical.

Synthesis; extraneous systems; dynamism

Polotsky’s *Transpositions* of 1976 anticipates the *Grundlagen*, and is the synthetic counterpart of the *Egyptian Tenses*. Polotsky’s persistent quest for synthesis (especially for the ultimate blueprint of the verbal system), which must be distinguished from his favourite tabular schematisation, was informed by the essentially logic-oriented construct of a ternary part-of-speech sub-system: substantive, adjective, adverb, and the corresponding transformations of an underlying fourth part of speech, namely the finite verb (which of course ranks differently in the part-of-speech system. In point of fact, it does not belong there at all, being not a “part”, but a nexal syntagm, i.e. a pattern, a complex sign). This part-of-speech system, which is philosophical or logical, non-analytic, a priori and grammatically meaningless for any single language, and the transformative ploy are both quintessentially non-structural, and, I feel, constitute a regression in Polotsky’s grammatical thought.

Polotsky’s original use of “converter”, structurally conceived (in his published use, to my knowledge only in the *Coptic Conjugation System* (1960),⁸ where the distinction between

8 However, consider “en convertissant le verb en nom (proposition relative)” in the *Études de syntaxe copte* (1944) p.67; also there, “la proposition convertie en nom”, the role and effect of the relative clause being

“sentence converter” and “conjugation base” is the core insight in a masterpiece of morpho-syntactic examination, the culmination of his structural analysis. (In the 1957 review of Till’s *Koptische Grammatik*, 1st edition, we read that these elements “convert *the tense* from a main sentence into a subordinate clause” (my italics). In classroom presentations, the concept was used by Polotsky also for pre-Coptic Egyptian and for other languages, e.g. Neo-Aramaic and Turkish) and was not especially, certainly not explicitly related with the part-of-speech model; hence the inclusion of *ne-* and the reservation concerning the Second Tenses. The dramatic retraction in the *Grundlagen* (1987, p.3), with *ne-* excluded and the Second Tenses reinstated as the first and indeed *par excellence* conversion, is no less than a declaration of the change of model: “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”. Note here two crucial, if hidden, statements – the implicit equation Conversion = “Transposition”, which retrospectively modifies the *Coptic Conjugation System* definition, and the almost euphemistic use of “word-class”, for “part of speech”. Polotsky does not refer to the *ne-* feature again in the *Grundlagen*, and, *ex silentio*, excludes it from the category. The obfuscating effect of the part-of-speech model could not be more strikingly illustrated.

In a recent paper on Polotsky’s conception of intra-textual and inter-clausal relationships, and especially his application of the word-formation and word-class-marking aspects of “conversion”,⁹ I have pointed to this programmatic, often blended duality of analysis and synthesis (see note 1). I shall not enlarge here on this set of features, arguably the most important issue in the Egyptian component of Polotsky’s work, but point out, in summing up, that here, more than in any other issue, we discern Polotsky’s conflicting drives for analysis and synthesis, which inform his method throughout the years. The dynamic factor of conversion – transformation, or transposition, as Polotsky laconically (and somewhat coyly) prefers to call it – is a presentation factor of the synthesis.¹⁰ The decision to present this as something that happens to, and modifies the form of a basic sentence (earlier: a verb) form, instead of as a subsystem of signals that mark and oppose nexal patterns, is, as I see it, a packaging-design decision, kindred to Polotsky’s favourite tabular presentation, and the hierarchy involved is essentially non-dynamic.

To conclude this cursory talk, let me stress again the importance of an integrated, multi-language approach to Polotsky’s work, considering conjointly all its language-specific facets. Also, I would warn of the canonizing danger, often encountered when appreciating the great. Like Saussure’s, Polotsky’s ideas were not offered as a definitive account, let alone a “standard theory”.

“convertir une phrase en nom”. In this respect, the *Grundlagen* basically constitutes a return to a dynamic model, transformational *avant la lettre*; the substantival and adjectival conversions are thus early established, while the adverbial one is a thesis of the *Egyptian Tenses* (1965), and for Coptic, the review of Till’s *Koptische Grammatik* (1957).

9 See fn. 1.

10 Polotsky’s last paper, of 1991 on the ‘Article’ and ‘Determinative Pronoun’ in Coptic, in: *Lingua Aegyptia* 1 (1991), 241-242, and his earlier discussion of the possessive pronoun, in: *Enchoria* 13, 1985, employ similar techniques for presenting pronominal functions.