# Dialectal variation in Coptic possessive constructions

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**ABSTRACT**

The chapter studies the adnominal possessive constructions in the early dialects of Coptic in a descriptive and comparative way. Each variety of Coptic has at least two types of possessive patterns: one involves the linking element *n-/(m)-*, whereas the preposition *nte-* is used in the other construction. Examining the proportional difference between the attestations of the patterns in the various dialects as well as their distributional properties, the following conclusions can be made. There is a syntactically conditioned rule according to which only one of the constructions (*Pattern B*, mediated by *nte-*) can be used if the possessed noun is indefinite or modified. However, the distribution of the two patterns is not complementary. In unconditioned cases, when the possessed noun is simply definite, the *nte*-construction may nonetheless appear. The dialects differ as to how strongly they prefer to use *Pattern A* with simple definiteness. In Sahidic, in literary Lycopolitan, in Akhmimic, Mesokemic and dialect W, the use of the two patterns are principally distributed between the syntactic environments. In some of the northern dialects, however, the use of *Pattern A* is subject to lexical-semantic requirements, while there seems to be a free variation in other minor varieties.

## 1 Introduction: aims, methods and sources

This chapter aims to provide a comparative study of the distribution of adnominal possessive constructions in the early dialects of Coptic.[1] The nature of the study principally remains descriptive, but some of the results may be valuable in the broader perspective of linguistic typology as well. By comparing the form and distribution of possessives, I also intend to introduce a new morpho-syntactic criterion into Coptic comparative dialectology.[2]

Only adnominal possessive constructions will be considered throughout this chapter, and only constructions with a lexical possessor. This means that predicative possessive constructions and pronominal possessors are ignored here. Restricting the time period as much as possible is one of the most important methodological considerations in this analysis. Since certain minor dialects can only be attested between the 4th and 6th centuries, Sahidic data have been considered from the same period. Examples have been taken from a single corpus: the early version of the *Gospel of John* in the well-preserved P. Palau Rib. Inv. 183 (Quecke 1984).[3] The sources I used are mostly Biblical texts for various reasons. First of all, this type of texts can be found in all dialects, even in the earliest ones, and these manuscripts are usually carefully prepared, accurately written products. The relative stability of the content also provides an excellent basis for comparing the parallel versions. It might be useful to note – especially for the readers who are particularly

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[1] In preparing the present version of the paper I was supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

[2] In agreement with the view that the traditional method of comparing dialects primarily on the basis of orthographical and phonological differences is inadequate on its own, the study of morpho-syntax has recently become essential in Coptic dialectology. The importance of morpho-syntactic criteria has been claimed most explicitly by Wolf-Peter Funk (1985, 1988); see also the note made by Rodolphe Kasser (1990: 150).

[3] Note that many other dialects preserved parts or fragments exactly from this Gospel text.

cautious when translated texts are discussed – that the fact that these texts are all translations from Greek has no visible effect on the inner structure of noun phrases.

Previous study on the nominal syntax of various dialects is unbalanced. The two prominent varieties, Sahidic and Bohairic, have been described and analyzed most intensively. Besides the numerous reference grammars on Sahidic (from Stern (1880) to Layton (2000)), there is a huge literature on classical Bohairic. Less is known about early Bohairic varieties. A considerable attention has been devoted to Mesokemic after it had been identified as an independent dialect. The Akhmimic grammars (Rösch 1909 and Till 1928) are rather outdated, and as far as the other dialects are concerned, the main sources of their characteristic features are the articles of *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (Atiya 1991), and the introductory chapters and commentaries of certain text editions.

There are (at least) two types of possessive patterns in each variety of Coptic, but the distribution of the patterns and their interrelationships are not the same in all dialects. In one group of dialects, the distribution can be argued to be syntactically motivated, while in the other group semantic and lexical features also influence the choice of pattern. In Section 2, the Sahidic constructions will be presented. The Sahidic dialect is the traditional starting point or point of reference for any syntactic investigation in Coptic, and the Sahidic data are also likely to be more familiar to Egyptologists and linguists. In Section 3, the possessive constructions of early Biblical manuscripts from other dialects will be examined systematically, including varieties which have not been extensively analyzed in this respect. The observations made in previous literature will also be revised when necessary. The result of this comparative syntactic method will hopefully add some useful linguistic facts to the somewhat controversial issue as to how closely certain Coptic dialects are related.


## 2 The Sahidic distribution: Pattern A and B

The order of the essential constituents in Coptic possessive patterns is always the same: the possessed noun phrase is followed by a morpheme expressing the possessive relationship and the possessor noun phrase. The obvious formal difference between the two possessive patterns in Sahidic Coptic is the form of the linking element: one of them involves the element n̄-/(m̄-) *n-/(m)-* as a possessive marker, whereas the preposition n̄ⲧⲉ- *nte-* is used in the other construction.[4] According to the traditional description of the distribution between the two constructions, the possessive relationship is expressed by Pattern A (1), unless the possessed noun is indefinite (2), has a demonstrative article (3), or is accompanied by an other type of modifier (4), in which cases Pattern B is used (cf. Till 1961: 67, §113; Vergote 1983: 207-208, §190.1; Steindorff 1951: 76-77, §150).[5]

Pattern A

(1)      ⲡϣⲏⲣⲉ      ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ
           p-šêre      m-p-noute
           DEF:M.SG-son   POSS-DEF:M.SG-god
           'the son of God'                      (John 1:49)

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[4] As was mentioned in the introduction, only lexical possessors are discussed in this chapter. Pronominal possessors are expressed by the so-called possessive articles, or by the suffix pronoun attached to the *status pronimalis* of the preposition *nte-*. The categorial status of the two linking elements has been discussed in Egedi (2012: 66-67).
[5] The labels Pattern A and Pattern B are introduced for purely practical reasons, in order to have a rather neutral designation of the two patterns. These terms were already used in my earliest paper (2005) on this topic. Haspelmath, in his typological paper on Egyptian adnominal possessives (Haspelmath 2015), uses the terms *short* and *long possessive constructions*.

Pattern B

(2)      ⲟⲩⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ         ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲥⲁⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ
             ou-polis        nte-t-samaria
             INDF:SG-town   PGEN-DEF:F.SG-Samaria
             'a town of Samaria'                         (John 4:5)

(3)      ⲡⲉⲓϣⲏⲣⲉ        ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ
             pei-šêre        nte-p-rôme
             DEM:M.SG-son  PGEN-DEF:M.SG-man
             'this son of the man'                  (John 12:34)

(4)      ⲡϣⲏⲣⲉ         ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲧ        ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ
             p-šêre         n-ouôt        nte-p-noute
             DEF:M.SG-son   ADJZ-single   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-god
             'the only son of God'                 (John 3:18)

The relative frequency of the two patterns is strikingly different, which is not unexpected if certain semantic aspects of possessive relationship are taken into consideration. Noun phrases containing a possessor expression are prototypically definite, since possession and determination are closely related in their function of anchoring, i.e., identifying the referent of the noun phrase (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001: 964). Therefore, the pattern in (2) with its indefinite possessee is rather uncommon. The type of (3) is also rarely attested, because noun phrases are typically determined in one way or other; if its referent is already identified by a possessor, it hardly ever happens that it is also deictically modified.

    The distribution between the two possessive patterns in Sahidic can be formulated on purely syntactic grounds, as I have already argued in Egedi (2010, 2012):

1. *Pattern A* requires the obligatory (and simple) definiteness of the possessed noun as well as a strict adjacency between the possessee and the possessor.
2. *Pattern B* (the historically newer construction) is applied elsewhere, i.e., practically in all other cases.

However, the distribution of Pattern A and B is not complementary. Although Pattern B seems to be used in all the syntactic environments from which Pattern A is excluded, Pattern B may also be found with simple determination of the possessed noun, which suggests an asymmetrical relationship between the two patterns. This use of Pattern B is unmotivated, inasmuch as it is permitted rather than required. A free variation can be observed in these environments, as the examples (5) and (6) demonstrate. It must be noted, however, that the Coptic dialects differ as to how strongly they prefer to use Pattern A with simple definiteness. In Sahidic and some of the other dialects, *nte-* only appears sporadically, while in certian dialects its use is pervasive.[6]

(5)      ⲡⲣ̄ⲣⲟ          ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲥⲣⲁⲏⲗ
             p-rro          **nte**-p-israêl
             DEF:M.SG-king   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-Israel
             'the king of Israel'                   (John 12:13)

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[6] The cases in which the use of *nte-* is not forced by syntactic constraints will be called *unmotivated* throughout this chapter.

(6) ⲡⲣ̄ⲣⲟ      ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲥⲣⲁⲏⲗ
     p-rro      **m**-p-israêl
     DEF:M.SG-king      POSS-DEF:M.SG-Israel
     'the king of Israel'                               (John 1:49)

In spite of the descriptive tradition that already offered the rules of distribution in a very simple form, there have been attempts to explain the distribution on semantic grounds (cf. Layton 2000: 111-114, §§146-148). The problem with such semantically based approaches which aim to characterize the patterns on the basis of the nature of possessive relation-types is that the data often escape generalization (see Egedi 2010, and 2012: 97-98). Even the counterexamples listed by Ariel Shisha-Halevy (1986: 21) against a syntactically based distribution can be accounted for within the system of rules suggested here. His *definite possessee nte- possessor* pattern only indicates what has been said in the previous paragraph: the distribution of the two linking elements is not complementary. The possessed noun in Pattern A is obligatorily definite and is not compatible with any other determiner or modifier, but in Pattern B simple determination is not excluded either. The *definite possessee nte- indefinite possessor* pattern does not serve as a counterexample either, since no constraints have been formulated with respect to the possessor's determination in the suggested distributional rules. Finally, the examples for the *indefinite possessee n- possessor* pattern all contain a lexicalised expression of the type ⲛ̄-ⲧⲉⲓ-ϩⲉ *n-tei-he* / ⲛ̄-ⲧⲉⲓ-ⲙⲓⲛⲉ *n-tei-mine* POSS-DEM:F.SG-way 'such, of this sort' as their second constituent. There is only one pattern that might raise a problem for the present analysis, namely the *bare noun possessee n- possessor* pattern, in which the first noun phrase remains undetermined contrary to the rule proposed above. However, the contexts in which this pattern appear show no preference for either of the linking elements, but considerable oscillation can be observed between the use of *n-* and *nte-*. In these contexts, the noun phrases are used predicatively or fall within the scope of negation, which means that they are non-referential nominal expressions. Definiteness is somehow neutralized in these syntactic environments – as was also proposed by Satzinger (1992: 77).[7] Examples for this use will be provided below.

In a recent syntactically-based approach, Reintges (2004: 94) also proposed an explanation for the Sahidic distribution, which assumes agreement in definiteness. As he puts it, "the linkage marker ⲛ- is selected, when the possessed noun and the possessor agree in in/definiteness and consequently display the same type of determiner. (…) If there is a mismatch in definiteness, however, the competing marker ⲛⲧⲉ must be chosen instead." This definition, however, can be easily rejected by examples in which the possessor is indefinite:[8]

(7) ⲛ̄ⲃⲁⲗ     ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁ     ⲉⲁⲩϫⲡⲟϥ               ⲉϥⲟ       ⲛ̄ⲃⲗ̄ⲗⲉ
     n-bal     n-oua     e-a-u-čpo-f               e-f-o       n-blle
     DEF:PL-eye     POSS-one     SBRD-PST-3PL-give.birth-3SG.M     SBRD-3SG.M-do.STAT     as-blind
     'the eyes of one who was born blind'                 (John 9:32)

(8) ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲣⲉ     ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ     ⲥⲛⲁⲩ
     t-mntmntre     n-rôme     snau
     DEF:F.SG-witness     POSS-man     two
     'the witness of two men'                        (John 8:17)

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[7] As these complements are non-referential, and as such, non-definite, the use of Pattern B would be more appropriate in the framework proposed here. The constructions displaying Pattern A in these contexts seem to shift somehow to the classifying genitive type (also marked by *n-*), in which no referential assignment is involved.

[8] Chris Reintges (p.c.) defended his view by proposing that the definiteness agreement he observed might only be specific for late literary Sahidic. Considering that my Sahidic corpus is from the 5th century, I cannot test this hypothesis at the moment.

As has been pointed out, the choice between the linkers is absolutely indifferent to the form of the possessor: the second member of the construction can be indefinite or modified in both patterns.[9]

To provide an empirical basis for comparison between Sahidic and the other dialects, a corpus consisting of a relatively large amount of carefully collected data appeared to be indispensable. Therefore, all occurrences of possessive constructions have been collected from the previously chosen, 5th-century manuscript, the *Gospel of John* of P. Palau Rib. 183.[10] The text has 215 possessive constructions overall, out of which 199 can be characterized as Pattern A, while the remainder constructions belong to Pattern B (see Table 1 below). The proportion of Pattern B is observably moderate. However, this result is not surprising considering that, from a semantic point of view, prototypical possessives appear in Pattern A.

*Table 1. Possessive constructions in the Gospel of John of PPalau Ribes Inv 183*

| Possessive constructions in the corpus | 215 | |
|---|---|---|
| Pattern A | 199 | 92.6% |
| Pattern B | 16 | 7.4% |

Out of the 16 tokens for Pattern B, only two belong to the type illustrated in example (5), in which the use of *nte-* is unmotivated, but is not ungrammatical. In the other constructions, the use of Pattern B is also grammatically motivated. These syntactic environments are the followings:

i.) The possessed noun is indefinite / non-definite:

(9)   ⲟⲩⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ   ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲥⲁⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ
      ou-polis    nte-t-samaria
      INDF:SG-city    PGEN-DEF:F.SG -Samaria
      'a city of Samaria'                                (John 4:5)

(10)   ⲛⲉⲩⲛ̄   ⲟⲩⲡⲏⲅⲏ   ⲇⲉ   ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ   ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓⲁⲕⲱⲃ
       ne-un    ou-pêgê    de    mmau    nte-iakôb
       IPFV-EXIST    INDF:SG-fountain    SP    there    PGEN-Jacob
       'there was a fountain there of Jacob'              (John 4:6)

(11)   ⲟⲩⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ   ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓⲥ̄
       ou-mat^hêtês    nte-i<êsou>s
       INDF:SG-disciple    PGEN-Jesus
       'a disciple of Jesus'                              (John 19:38)

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[9] It is to be noted, that nominal expressions of the type (7) may be indefinite in a semantic sense. If the possessor is indefinite, the referent of the possessed noun cannot necessarily be identified. What we find in many languages is that the noun phrase as a whole is still marked morphosyntactically as definite in such cases. It seems to be, however, a privilege of inalienable relationships. Only relational nouns can occur in such constructions, that is to say, only possessive constructions headed by a relational noun can be interpreted as indefinite and, at the same time, have a definite syntax (cf. the "relational weak definites" in Lucas (2011)).

[10] The collection itself, arranged in a chart, can be found in Egedi (2012), not repeated here. From the final form of the collection, frequent, lexicalized expressions (e.g. ⲛ̄ⲑⲉ ⲛ̄- *n-t-he n-* 'like'; ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓⲙⲓⲛⲉ *n-tei-mine* 'of this sort, such') have been excluded as not diagnostic in this research. The expressions ⲉⲡⲓⲕⲣⲟ ⲛ̄- *e-pi-kro n-* / ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲕⲣⲟ ⲛ̄- *m-pi-kro n-* / ϩⲓⲡⲓⲕⲣⲟ ⲛ̄- *hi-pi-kro n-* 'across/beyond' a certain water type (e.g. river, sea) have also been excluded because these seem to be lexicalized compound prepositions. The systematic use of the determiner *pi-* in these expressions might support this assumption.

ii.) The possessed noun is modified; structural adjacency broken

(12)  ⲡⲣⲁⲛ       ⲙ̄ⲡϣⲏⲣⲉ        ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲧ       ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ
      p-ran      m-p-šêre        n-ouôt       nte-p-noute
      DEF:M.SG-name   POSS-DEF:M.SG-son   ADJZ-single   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-god
      'the name of the only Son of God'                          (John 3:18)

(13)  ⲡⲉⲭ̄ⲥ̄       ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ        ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ
      pe-kʰ<risto>s   et-ouaab        nte-p-noute
      DEF:M.SG-Christ   REL-pure.STAT   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-god
      'the holy Christ of God'                                    (John 6:69)

(14)  ⲡϩⲁⲉ       ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩ   ⲛⲟϭ   ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡϣⲁ
      p-hae      n-hoou   noc   nte-p-ša
      DEF:M.SG-last   ADJZ-day   large   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-feast
      'the last great day of the feast'                           (John 7:37)

iii.) In predicative use:

(15)  ⲁϥϯ       ⲛⲁⲩ   ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⳅⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ       ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲩϣⲱⲡⲉ
      a-f-tⁱ     na-u   n-t-ekˢousia       e-tre-u-šôpe
      PST-3SG.M-give   to-3PL   ACC-DEF:F.SG-authority   to-CAUS.INF-3PL-become
      ⲛ̄ϣⲏⲣⲉ       ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ
      n-šêre      nte-p-noute
      as-son      PGEN-DEF:M.SG-god
      'he gave the authority for them to become the children of God'   (John 1:12)

(16)  ϫⲉⲕⲁⲥ     ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛⲉϣⲱⲡⲉ        ⲛ̄ϣⲏⲣⲉ       ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲟⲩⲟⲓⲛ
      čekas     e-tetn-e-šôpe        n-šêre      nte-p-ouoin
      so that   FUT-2PL-:FUT-become   as-son   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-light
      'that you should become the sons of the light'              (John 12:36)

(17)  ⲁϥⲁⲁϥ       ⲛ̄ϣⲏⲣⲉ       ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ
      a-f-aa-f     n-šêre      nte-p-noute
      PST-3SG.M-do-3SG.M   as-son   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-god
      'he made himself son of God'                                (John 19:7)

As has been mentioned above, a free varion between the two patterns can be observed in predicative use. In this corpus, three occurrences follow Pattern B, whereas two occurrences follow Pattern A – apparently without any structural or contextual motivation. For the use of Pattern A in predicartive context, observe (18):

(18)  ⲡⲉⲧⲓⲣⲉ       ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲃⲉ       ϥⲟ       ⲛϩⲙ̄ϩⲁⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲃⲉ
      p-et-ire     m-p-nobe       f-o       n-xmhal m-p-nobe
      DEF:M.SG-REL-do   ACC-DEF:M.SG-sin   3SG.M-do.STAT   as-servant   POSS-DEF:M.SG-sin
      'He who doeth (the) sin is servant of sin'                  (John 8:34)

There are two examples in the Gospel text that go against the syntactic distribution proposed at the beginning of this section. In these phrases, the possessed noun is indefinite and nontheless appears in a Pattern A construction (see examples (19) and (20)). It is not impossible that the first

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of these two examples was interpreted as a partitive construction, since both Horner's Sahidic edition and the Lycopolitan *Gospel of John* agree.

(19) ογαρχων      ⲛ̄ιογⲇⲁι[11]
ou-ark^hôn      n-ioudai
INDF:SG-leader      POSS-(DEF:PL)-Jew
'a leader of the Jews'                                        (John 3:1)


(20) ογcγⲅⲅⲉⲛⲏc      ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁⲡⲉⲧⲣⲟc      cⲗ̄ⲡⲡⲉϥⲙⲁⲁϫⲉ
ou-suggenês      m-p-ent-a-petros      slp-pef-maače
INDF:SG-kinsman      POSS-DEF:M.SG-REL-PST-Petros      cut-POSS:3SGM.MSG-ear
'a kinsman of him whose ear Peter cut off '                                        (John 18:26)


It must be noted that some elements can seemingly break the direct adjacency of members in Pattern A. These elements, however, are enclitic function words or discourse particles, which do not really break the grammatical juncture within the noun phrase, but rather obey to a post-syntactic phonological adjustment rule that positions them in the second place of the sentence. They cliticize to the first element of the clause that has an accent of its own, whatever the category or function of this element might be. If this element happens to be the first member of a possessive construction, the clitic virtually intersects the sequence of the possessed noun and the possessor, but does not affect the inner structure of the noun phrase.


(21) ⲛⲉⲡⲣⲁⲛ      ⲇⲉ      ⲙⲡ̄ϩⲙ̄ϩⲁⲗ      ⲡⲉ      ⲙⲁⲗⲭⲟc
ne-p-ran      de      m-p-hmhal      pe      malk^hos
IPVF-DEF:M.SG-name      SP      POSS-DEF:M.SG-servant      COP      Malkhos
'The name of the servant was Malkhos'                                        (John 18:10)


Nevertheless, this phenomenon (i.e., the concurrence of second place particles with Pattern A type possessives) is rather infrequent in our corpus, since subjects in the translated Bible texts often occur right-dislocated. The other possible noun phrase positions are that of the object or the complement of a preposition, which are always more to the right in the syntactic structure.


## 3 Possessive constructions in other early Coptic dialects

All Coptic dialects make use of two types of possessive linking elements. It is striking, however, that the proportion of the linking element *nte-* within the possessive constructions is 7.4 % in Sahidic, while it is 76.4 % in Bohairic (as it will be shown below). The difference in proportion can be due to the fact that rules behind the distribution are basically different. In Sahidic, the distribution of possessive constructions is purely syntactically motivated, while in Bohairic semantic and lexical features also influence the choice between the patterns. In the comparative study that follows, the possessive structures of early biblical manuscripts from various dialects will be examined. Observations made by previous literature will be taken into consideration and revised if necessary.

In Till (1931), the topic of possessive construction ('Genitivverbindung') is summarized in about a page. The two editions of the same book also contain some contradictions. According to his first statement (Till 1931: 18, §21), the linking element in possessive constructions is normally *n-*, the other linking morpheme, *nte-* being quite frequent in Bohairic and Fayyumic. In the second edition of the same book (1961b: 16, §77) *nte-* is claimed to be frequent in the

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[11] Here ⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲟγⲇⲁⲓ *n-n-ioudai* POSS-DEF:PL-Jew 'of the Jews' is meant, cf. Quecke (1984: 54).

Subakhmimic (i.e. Lycopolitan) dialect as well. This latter is surprising, since the author rightly observes in the first edition that, in Sahidic and Subakhmimic, *nte-* occurs in well-defined cases only: if the possessed noun (the *regens* in Till's terminology) has an indefinite article or is divided from the possessor (*rectum*) by another expression. Till also mentions Akhmimic, in which *nte-* only appears in isolated cases, but he also identifies a third linking element (*tn-*), which seems to be specific to Akhmimic. It is rarely used, and its distribution is similar to that of *nte-* in Sahidic. Interestingly, it is only mentioned in the first edition.

There are some further problems with Till's survey. He provides the example for Bohairic: ⲡⲓⲏⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲓⲱⲧ *pi-êi m-pa-iôt* DEF:M.SG-house POSS-my-father 'das Haus meines Vater' (1961b: 16, §75), which hardly occurs in this dialect. In Bohairic, the use of determiners is strongly related to the choice between the two possessive morphemes, as will be discussed in Section 3.3: the linking element *n-* co-occurs with the *p*-determination, and hardly ever with the *pi*-determination, i.e. with the 'strong' series of definite articles. The case of Fayyumic is also simplified. Till (1931, 1961b) does not discuss Mesokemic, since at the time of the compilation of his dialectal grammar (at least that of the first edition) Mesokemic was not acknowledged as an independent literary dialect. Other minor varieties are also absent in this manual and will be discussed in the following sections.

To sum it up, some preliminary conclusions can already be drawn on the basis of Till (1931, 1961b). There *is* a variation among the dialects, and at least in two dialects (Sahidic and Akhmimic) the distribution of possessive patterns seems to be motivated by syntax. The situation in the rest of the dialects, however, remained rather unclear. Therefore, a data-based investigation is highly needed. The main aspects of this reseach are the followings:

    i)     do the syntactic requirements hold (obligatory definiteness and adjacency)?

    ii)    how frequent is Pattern B?

    iii)   if Pattern B shows a considerable frequency, is the distribution of the patterns motivated by lexical or semantic factors as was suggested for Bohairic?

## 3.1 Lycopolitan

The comparative analysis will begin with Lycopolitan (also known as Subakhmimic) possessives, the account of which was really puzzling in Till (1931, 1961b).

There is no comprehensive description of Lycopolitan, and it has been already observed (Funk 1985: 135; Nagel 1991; Gardner, Alcock & Funk 1999: 90-91) that probably one has to deal with three or four distinct dialects rather than with a single one: the Manichaean corpus (L4), the London *Gospel of John* (L5), the variety attested in Nag Hammadi codices I, X, XI (L6), and the Kellis corpus (L*). In this study, the possessive constructions of one variety (L5) will be discussed in a detailed fashion, but a few observations will also be made concerning the varieties L4 and L*.

The Lycopolitan version of the *Gospel of John* (Thompson 1924) is almost complete (2:12–3:21 and 4:5–20:27). The index of the text edition identifies 9 occurrences of *nte-*, but three additional occurrences have been found (7:37, 11:52 and 18:12) during the collation with the Sahidic version. Accordingly, there are altogether 12 occurrences of *nte-* in the text, which means that the proportion of this pattern with respect to the total number of possessives is practically the same as in Sahidic.

The research confirmed the commonly accepted view that Lycopolitan morphosyntax is fairly close to that of Sahidic, as far as the variety L5 is concerned. The distribution of the possessive constructions practically corresponds to the syntactic constraints established for Sahidic.[12]

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[12] Till (1928: 91, §85), in his grammatical description of Akhmimic, noted that the Lycopolitan *nte-* is much more frequent if the expression 'God' stands for the possessor. The claim itself is questionable, but all the examples he

Divergence was only found in cases when the use of *nte-* is unmotivated in the Sahidic version, and thus cannot be considered more than a stylistic variant, or in cases of predicative contexts, in which oscillation is somewhat normal or expected, as has been demonstrated above; compare example (16) with example (22).

(22)    ⲝⲉⲕⲁⲥⲉ    ⲉⲣⲉⲧⲛⲉϣⲱ[ⲡⲉ        ⲛ̄ϣⲏⲣ]ⲉ    ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲟⲩⲟⲓⲛ
        čekase    ere-tn-na-šôpe        n-šêre    m-p-ouaein
        so that    THMZ-2PL-FUT-become    as-son    POSS-DEF:M.SG-light
        'that you may become the sons of the light'        (John 12:36)

Similarly, in four cases (John 4:10, 6:28, 6:29, and 10:2) where Sahidic has Pattern A, the Lycopolitan Gospel has *nte-*, but all these cases belong to the syntactically unmotivated type.[13] Finally, the rare combination of a demonstrative article with a possessor can be observed in (11:13), which as a rule triggers the use of *nte-*:

(23)    ⲉϥⲝⲉⲣⲁ    ⲡⲉⲉⲓⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲧⲕⲉ    ⲛ̄ⲧ[ⲉ]    ⲡⲱⲃϣ
        e-f-čera    peei-nkatke    nt[e]    p-ôbš
        SBRD-3SG-mean    DEM:M.SG-sleep    PGEN    DEF:M.SG-oblivion
        '(Jesus speaks it of his death, but they think that) he referred to this taking rest in sleep'
        (John 11:13)

The text corpora that present other Lycopolitan dialects (L4, L6 and L*) are of very different nature. The introductory chapter of one of the Kellis text editions (Gardner et al. 1999) that desribes the language of the documentary texts does not deal with the question of possessives at all. There can only be found a short comment in the book, which suggests that the strategies do not diverge from the standard:

> "The exact sense of the various ⲛ- and ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ-constructions (arguably 'of' or 'for' or even 'from' ⲛ̄ⲧⲛ̄) is somewhat tricky, but we have supposed them all to indicate possession. The pattern of ⲛ- between definite nouns and the name, and ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ- with indefinites, is almost perfect (excepting 1.8 where the one case of ⲛ- following an indefinite is probably a dative as 'possessive') Thus, it seems most likely that they are syntactically complementary." (Gardner et al. 1999: 260)[14]

The Manichaean corpus and the language of the non-Sahidic Nag Hammadi codices will probably present much more variation, as far as my preliminary investigation suggests. Examining the first twenty pages of the *Manichaean Psalm-Book* (Allberry 1938), 145 possessive constructions have been found in total, out of which 31 are connected with *nte-*. This means that the proportion of *nte-* with respect to the total number of possessives is 21.4%, which is three times as much as what has been observed in the Sahidic corpus.[15] Nevertheless, it is remarkable

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cites for illustration are configurations in which the use of *nte-* is required independently of the lexical content of the structure (i.e., the possessee is indefinite or modified).

[13] It is interesting to note that in John 11:52 both Sahidic and Lycopolitan display an unmotivated *nte-* which might be an accident, but it is even more probable that the redactions are somehow related. It is not unlikely either that in a more original version these apparently unmotivated cases were actually motivated, for instance, they might have a demonstrative or indefinite article (rather than a simple definite one) or an extra modifier that disappeared in course of time. There exists another manuscript, the Chester Beatty Codex AC 1390, containing a pericope with a section of John 10:7-13:38, but unfortunatelly I had no access to the editions (Funk 1990, Kasser 1995).

[14] But see Shisha-Halevy's review (2002: 307) who accuses this treatment of being "over-simplifying."

[15] Secure cases have been taken into consideration only (i.e., phrases either partially broken, or with obscure meaning have been ignored).

that the proportion of cases in which the use of *nte-* can be motivated by the syntactic rules is 7.5%, which practically corresponds to the proportion attested in Sahidic. In the remaining cases, no trace has been found of any lexemic constraint to motivate the distribution: certain lexemes freely occur in both constructions. The unmotivated cases appear to be instances of a mere stylistic variation, although a much deeper analysis is needed before drawing any final conclusion about the language of the Manichaean corpus.[16] A further challenge will be provided by the examination of the non-Sahidic Nag Hammadi texts (NHC I, X, XI). The analysis of possessive constructions in these manuscripts might be an important contribution to the issue as to how closely these Lycopolitan varieties are related.


## 3.2 Akhmimic

Akhmimic is the only one among the minor literary dialects whose grammar has been discussed in two detailed monographs. However, these grammatical descriptions deal with the possessive constructions in no more than a few lines, and contradict each other even in these short accounts. According to Rösch (1909: 95-96, §73), the Akhmimic possessive construction is similar to that of Bohairic, inasmuch as only the morpheme *nte-* is used. He cites a single example to illustrate this claim. Assimilation of Akhmimic to Bohairic raises several problems, as the Bohairic possessive system with its double series of definite articles is much more complicated, and, as far as I know, Akhmimic has no *pi*-determination like the one used in Bohairic. The *pi*-series may only appear in Akhmimic as the reduced variety of demonstratives. Till (1928: 92, §86), contrary to what Rösch proposed, claims that *nte-* is rather rare in Akhmimic, it actually appears in a single text, the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.[17] Instead, the preposition ⲧⲛ̄- *tn-* is occasionally used if the possessed noun has a modifier. This suggests that the Akhmimic *tn-* seems to behave as the Sahidic *nte-* does. Of course, both the frequency and the precise distribution of *tn-* is to be checked and studied in a more systematic way, before claiming their functional equivalence.

Unfortunately, the Strasbourg Codex that has preserved a section from the *Gospel of John* in Akhmimic (John 10:1-13:12, P. Strasb. Copt 371, 372, 375-385) is extremely fragmentary. Based on the original edition (Rösch 1910), two certain cases of possessive constructions can only be seen, but the new online edition of the text provides a much better display of the fragments and the reconstructions. In this edition, which has been prepared within *The International Greek New Testament Project* (http://www.igntp.org/),[18] eight possessive markers can be identified, admitting that three are uncertain.

(24)  ⲡⲡⲁⲥⲭⲁ          ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲓⲟⲩⲇⲁⲓ
      p-pask^ha        n-n-ioudai
      DEF:M.SG-passover  PGEN-DEF:PL-jew
      'the passover of the Jews'                                              (John 11:55)

The occurrences match the Sahidic version, except for one locus (12:13), in which the Barcelona Gospel has an unmotivated *nte-*.

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[16] I made a tentative suggestion previously (Egedi 2012: 126), according to which some rhythmical or metrical factors could also have influenced the choice between the shorter and the longer forms, since the psalms were performed in singing.

[17] The text was published by Steindorff (1899). Note that the example Friedrich Rösch cited in his dissertation to illustrate the Akhmimic possessive construction comes from *Apocalypse of Elijah*.

[18] For the text edition, see http://www.iohannes.com/XML/transcriptions/coptic/ac1.xml#
This corpus contains digitized transcriptions of several minor dialectal Coptic translations of the *Gospel of John* (coordinator: Christian Askeland).

To obtain more data from this dialect, another Biblical text, the Akhmimic *Proverbs* (Ms. Berol. Orient. Oct. 987. Publ. Böhlig 1958) has also been checked and collated with the early Sahidic redaction of the *Proverbs*, which is a nearly complete manuscript of the Haskell Oriental Museum of the University of Chicago (Ch No. 10485. Publ. Worrell 1931). This research was not as exhaustive as the one carried out in other dialectal Gospel texts, so the results must be taken as preliminary only: beside the abundant use of Pattern A, three *loci* have been found where *tn-* serves as the linking element in Akhmimic Pattern B. At the corresponding places, *nte-* is used in Sahidic (*Proverbs* 3:9, 7:16 and 16:14). Hence Till's claim about the relation of these linking elements seems to be provisionally justified.

(25)  ⲟⲩϥⲁⲉⲓϣⲓⲛⲉ        ⲧⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲛⲧⲉ
      ou-faišine        **tm**-p-nounte
      INDF:SG-news.bearer   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-God
      'a messenger of God'                                             (Prov 16:14)


**3.3 Bohairic**

Besides Sahidic, the Bohairic dialect has been studied more extensively. The nominal syntax of classical Bohairic received a considerable attention in the works of Shisha-Halevy (1994: 233-246; 2007: 430-447), as well as in a paper by Depuydt on Bohairic articles (1985). Therefore, their observations and claims will be considered forst, before turning to analyze the early Bohairic (B4) version of *John*.

Bohairic has two series of definite articles, which are traditionally called 'weak' and 'strong' articles. There is a strong correlation between the use of the articles and the distribution of possessive constructions. As it was already pointed out by Mallon (1907: §§159-160) *nte-* is used with the *pi*-series, while with the *p*-series both linking elements can appear (see also Depuydt (1985: 52), Shisha-Halevy (1994: 235) and (2007: 431)). It is important to note that the *pi*-series never combines with the linking element *n-*.[19] Table 2 summarizes the possible patterns:

*Table 2. Possessive patterns in Bohairic*

| Pattern | | Name |
|---|---|---|
| Type of the article | Type of the linking element | |
| ⲡⲓ- / ϯ- / ⲛⲓ-    *pi- / ti- / ni-* | ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ-    *nte-* | ~ *Pattern B* |
| ⲡ- / ⲧ-    *p- / t-* | ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ-    *nte-* | ? |
| ⲡ- / ⲧ- / ⲛⲉⲛ-    *p- / t- / nen-* | ⲛ-    *n-* | ~ *Pattern A* |

The Sahidic distributional rule also holds in Bohairic: *nte-* is required in non-definite contexts and with modified possessees. However, the extremely high proportion of Bohairic Pattern B cannot be accounted for purely by syntactic conditions. The use of the linking element *n-* is limited to constructions in which the possessed noun satisfies certain lexical-semantic requirements. The nominal categories in question are all associated with inalienability (cf. Shisha-Halevy's exhaustive listing for "inalienable association" (1994: 236-239), see also the selections of Depuydt (1985: 61), and Shisha-Halevy (2007: 436-438)). In a slightly different approach, these categories correspond to the conceptual lexical type of the so-called inherently relational nouns. The referents of these nouns are characterized by a particular relation to some other entity,

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[19] Contrary to the example provided by Till (1961b: 16, §75), as Depuydt (1985: 62, n. 14) pointed it out.

usually specified by means of a possessive construction (cf. Löbner 2011: 2-4).[20] The problem with inalienable / inherently relational nouns is that their proper set cannot be defined, or limited by means of clear-cut semantic features. Great fluctuation can be observed in the Bohairic data as well: there are nouns that prototypically enter into the *p-... n-* pattern, but for most of the lexemes, permeability between the patterns is possible and well attested. The system appears to be flexible and not fully predictable.

The pattern *p-... nte-* (which stands in the middle row in Table 2) poses even more problems for the analysis.[21] According to Shisha-Halevy (1994: 239-241; 2007: 440-442) the nouns attested in this pattern can be classified in two sub-groups: i.) inalienable nouns that are "depersonalized" or "loosened" in this construction: they become "more general, less specific and less intimately associated" as he explains; ii.) lexemes "echoing" or "mirroring" inalienables. Reviewing the examples provided in the referred literature, one can hardly understand how these fuzzy semantic distinctions operate in syntax. Shisha-Halevy himself admits (2007: 431) that "the mystery is still anything but cleared up."

All these observations have been based on late manuscripts of classical Bohairic,[22] whereas early Bohairic has not been analyzed in this respect. Therefore, the possessive constructions in the early Bohairic *Gospel of John* of P. Bodmer III (Kasser 1958) have also been collected and compared with the Sahidic corpus (Quecke 1984) on the one hand, and with classical Bohairic (Horner 1898), on the other (a constrastive table of the data can be found in Egedi (2012: 131-135)). The early Bohairic version of the Gospel text has 174 possessive constructions overall, out of which, in 133 cases, the members of the construction are connected by *nte-*. This means that the proportion of the *nte-*constructions is 76.4%.[23] In the Sahidic corpus, this proportion was 7.4% so the difference is striking.[24]

*Table 3. Possessive constructions in the Gospel of John of P. Bodmer III*

| Possessive constructions in the corpus | 174 |
|---|---|
| Patterns with *nte-* | 133 |
| Proportion of patterns with *nte-* in the text | 76.4 % |

Moreover, the early Bohairic version seems to be more abundant in *nte-*constructions than the standardized classical version, in which the proportion is only 55.2% (see Table 4). This means that, in the classical Bohairic text, about half of the constructions display Pattern A, while in the early text of P. Bodmer III only one third of the patterns can be characterized as Pattern A.

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[20] In Löbner's model (2011), the semantic theory of determination is based on the distinction of four conceptual lexical types of nouns: sortal nouns (which are neither unique, nor relational, e.g. *book, stone*), individual nouns (which are inherently unique, e.g. *moon, weather*), relational nouns (which are non unique relational, e.g. *leg, part, sister*) and functional nouns (which are both inherently unique and relational, e.g. *father, head, age*). All nouns are assigned a lexical type in the lexicon that constitutes their meaning. If they are still used in contexts that seem to contradict the basic type assignment, they are assumed to undergo a type shift.

[21] Depuydt (1985: 53) claims that this pattern is almost entirely absent, but my investigations on Bohairic corpora do not support his view. The pattern is quite frequent in early as well as in classical Bohairic manuscripts. See also the critical note of Shisha-Halevy (1994: 233, n. 28) in this respect.

[22] See Shisha-Halevy (2007: 11-12) for the sources he used in his monograph on Bohairic syntax; the manuscripts are dated to the tenth and fourteenth centuries.

[23] Fixed expression and lexicalized compound prepositions have been excluded according to the method used in the case of the Sahidic collection of data.

[24] It is to be noted that the semantic field the preposition *nte-* can cover is somehow broader in Bohairic than in Sahidic: in several places, Bohairic used *nte-* when the other dialect has an attributive or partitive construction.

*Table 4. Possessive constructions in Horner's Gospel of John*

| | |
|---|---|
| Possessive constructions in the text | 163 |
| Patterns with *nte-* | 90 |
| Proportion of patterns with *nte-* in the text | 55.2 % |

The opposition of the two main patterns can clearly be observed in pairs of example such as (26) and (27), considering that only one of the two possessed nouns are relational. In other cases, however, the choice seems to be rather arbitrary. For instance, in (29), it is the plurality of the possessed noun ('servants') that might be responsible for the loosening of the construction.[25] Note, however, that the lexeme ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ *mat^hêtês* 'disciple' always seems to remain a strictly relational noun in plural form as well, and it is hard to imagine what can be the difference in the lexico-semantic properties of these two nouns: a 'servant' presupposes the existence of a 'lord' just the same way as a 'disciple' implies that of a 'master'. There are additional "odd" phenomena: for instance, the lexeme for 'feet' (always occuring in plural) is definitely a relational noun, and still it appears twice in pattern *p-... n-*, and twice in pattern *p-... nte-* in similar contexts. The expression 'fear from/of something' also fluctuates between the two patterns, as can be seen in (30) and (31), although in both cases the possessor expressions refer to the same group of people ('the Jews') used in a generic sense. The textual contexts in which these phrases are used are also very similar.

(26) ⲛⲉⲛϣⲏⲣⲓ ⲛⲛⲁⲃⲣⲁⲁⲙ
nen-šêri      n-abraam
DEF:PL-son      POSS-Abraham
'the sons of Abraham'                                    (John 8:39)

(27) ⲛⲓϩⲃⲏⲩⲓ ⲛⲧⲉⲁⲃⲣⲁⲁⲙ
ni-hbêui      nte-abraam
DEF:PL-thing.PL      PGEN-Abraham
'the works of Abraham'                                    (John 8:39)

(28) ⲡⲃⲱⲕ ⲙⲡⲓⲁⲣⲭⲓⲉⲣⲉⲩⲥ
p-bôk      m-pi-ark^hiereus
DEF:M.SG-servant      POSS-DEF:M.SG-chief.priest
'the servant of the chief priest'                                    (John 18:10)

(29) ⲛⲓⲉⲃⲓⲁⲓⲕ ⲛⲧⲉⲡⲓⲁⲣⲭⲓⲉⲣⲉⲩⲥ
ni-ebiaik      nte-pi-ark^hiereus
DEF:PL-servant.PL      PGEN-DEF:M.SG-chief.priest
'the servants of the chief priest'                                    (John 18:26)

(30) ⲧϩⲟϯ ⲛⲛⲓⲟⲩⲓⲇⲁⲓ
t-hot^i      n-ni-ouidai
DEF:F.SG-fear      POSS-DEF:PL-Jew
'the fear from (lit.of) the Jews'                                    (John 19:38)

(31) ⲧϩⲟϯ ⲛⲧⲉⲛⲓⲟⲩⲓⲇⲁⲓ
t-hot^i      nte-ni-ouidai
DEF:F.SG-fear      PGEN-DEF:PL-Jew
'the fear from (lit.of) the Jews'                                    (John 20:19)

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[25] According to Shisha-Halevy (2007: 434), plurality "reduces in degree the Constituence Association".

By the careful rearrangement of the data (and by excluding irrelevant cases), the following has been found: the main source of the proportional difference of *nte-* between the two Bohairic versions is the relatively high number of the "intermediate" pattern, *p-... nte-* in early Bohairic. 37 constructions have been found of this kind in P. Bodmer III and only half of them are realized with the same pattern in classical Bohairic. The majority of the other half of the examples corresponds to a *p-... n-* strategy in the later version, and two are expressed by *pi-... nte-*.

What is even more extraordinary is that, in 14 cases, P. Bodmer III displays a *pi-... nte-* type construction where Horner's edition has *p-... n-* patterns. This group of data is abundant in cases in which the possessed noun is either relational in a strict sense (e.g. body parts: ϭⲓⲝ *cič* 'hand' in (10:29), ⲙⲉⲥⲑⲏⲧ *mest^hêt* 'breast' in (13.25); or kinship term: ϣⲏⲣⲓ *šêri* 'son' in (11:4) and (17:12)); or belong to lexeme types that are not necessary but typically relational (e.g., testimony, glory, foundation, etc.).

The lexeme types that appear in Pattern A in early Bohairic (P. Bodmer III) are clearly relational and nicely correspond to their uses in classical Bohairic.[26] At the same time, there are many nouns with similar lexico-semantic features that do not appear in Pattern A. On the contrary, they can be attested in either of the two alternative configurations. What is more remarkable, a few of the 17 lexemes attested in Pattern A in P. Bodmer III can also be found in the other constructions (even the lexeme ϣⲏⲣⲓ *šêri* 'son').

The only thing that can be concluded at this point is that the grammar of possessive constructions is either extremely permissive in this variety, or is far from being understood, and completely new aspects must be involved in the analysis. Yet, one aspect of the results is worth considering: the remarkable and undeniable difference in the proportion of the *nte-*constructions in the two dialectal varieties of Bohairic. As historical linguistics and typological studies have shown, if a language has two competing strategies for the same grammatical function and the choice between the two is conditioned either by formal properties or by lexico-semantic features (e.g., inalienability), it is usually the older and recessive construction that is subject to these constraints (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001). Haspelmath (2015) pointed out that, in the course of grammaticalization, constructions get restricted to the most frequent (prototypical) contexts. He calls this phenomenon "downsizing to core task". This model perfectly accounts for the distribution of Sahidic patterns (restriction to definite contexts), as well as for the distribution of Bohairic patterns (restriction to inalienable contexts). The question to be addressed here is why the proportion of the younger and less restricted construction (the *nte-*construction) is higher in a language variety of the fourth century (B4) than in manuscripts of the same dialect from the tenth century or even later (B5). This goes against what has been observed diachronically in other languages and what can be predicted typologically. Two types of explanations can be tentatively offered at this point: on the one hand, one may assume that the two varieties (the one attested in P. Bodmer III and the classical Bohairic of Horner's edition) are not directly affiliated; admitting that they probably derive from the same proto-Bohairic dialect. On the other hand, the direct relationship between the two varieties can be sustained, but in this case one has to account for a rather exceptional diachronic process. In the early Bohairic version, the proportion of the constructions that require for nouns with special lexical properties radically decreased in favor of the new contruction mediated by *nte-*. This process, however, stopped at a certain point and a core group of relational nouns started to systematically appear in Pattern A (and almost exclusively in Pattern A)*,* causing a much sharper grammatical split in the distribution of the

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[26] Lexemes that appear in *Pattern A* in P. Bodmer III: ϣⲏⲣⲓ *šêri* 'son' (14 times), ⲣⲁⲛ *ran* 'name' (4 times), ⲃⲁⲗ *bal* 'eye' (4 times), ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ *mat^hêtês* 'disciple' (twice), ⲭⲣⲟⲝ *čroč* 'seed' (twice), ⲱⲟⲩ *ôou* 'glory' (twice), ϣⲉⲣⲓ *šeri* 'daughter', ⲥⲟⲛ *son* 'brother', ⲥⲟⲛⲓ *soni* 'sister', ⲅⲏⲧ *hêt* 'heart', ϭⲁⲗⲁⲩⲝ *calauč* 'foot', ⲫⲁⲧ *p^hat* 'foot', ⲥⲁⲭⲓ *sači* 'word', ⲃⲱⲕ *bôk* 'servant', ⲁⲣⲭⲓⲉⲣⲉⲩⲥ *ark^hiereus* 'chief priest', ⲅⲟϯ *hot^j* 'fear', ⲁⲅⲁⲡⲏ *agapê* 'love'.

possessive noun phrases. This reanalysis could even result in a proportional increase of the older pattern, as lexemes with similar lexico-semantic properties also started to prefer the construction preserved for "the core members" of the relational and functional conceptual types of nouns. The path reconstructed in this manner is undeniably strange. Still, it is acceptable if one takes into consideration that the process could be reinforced by the influence of classical Sahidic, the prestigious dialect of the first millenium. In Sahidic, more than 90% of the possessive contructions were mediated by *n-*. Even if the distribution of the two patterns was conditioned on completely different grounds in Sahidic, the high frequency of *n-* itself could have a conserving effect on Pattern A in Bohairic.

   Some additional Biblical fragments that are claimed to belong to one of the early Bohairic dialects (B4 and B74) have also been examined. Two of these manuscripts (fragments from the *Epistle of James* in P. Mich. Kopt. 452 (Quecke 1974*)*, fragments from the *Epistle to the Romans,* and from the *Book of Job* in P. Mich. Inv 926 (Husselman 1947)) only provided scarce evidence or no valuable data at all. There is a more promising manuscript, P. Vat. copto 9, which is, unfortunately, still unpublished, except for the second chapter of the *Book of Haggai* (Kasser, Quecke & Bosson 1992). In this excerpt, there are 27 possessive constructions in total, out of which 17 are of Pattern A-type, 8 of Pattern B, and two display the *p-... nte-* pattern. From the Pattern B group of data, only three are syntactically motivated. This source, which is often referred to as the manifestation of dialect B74, presents an interesting case of free variation, similar to tho the cases observed in P. Bodmer III. The expression for 'the temple of the Lord' appears in two types of construction within the same text (see examples (32-33) below), while classical Bohairic has Pattern B at both of these *loci*.

(32)  ⲡⲉⲣⲫⲉⲓ       ⲙ̄ⲡⲟ̄ⲥ
      p-erpʰei      m-p-c\<oei\>s
      DEF:M.SG-temple   POSS-DEF:M.SG-lord
      'the temple of the Lord'                                     (Haggai 6:15)


(33)  ⲡⲓⲉⲣⲫⲉⲓ      ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲟ̄ⲥ
      pi-erpʰei     nte-p-c\<oei\>s
      DEF:M.SG-temple   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-lord
      'the temple of the Lord'                                     (Haggai 6:18)


## 3.4 Mesokemic

The Mesokemic (Middle-Egyptian) dialect has been preserved by several long Biblical manuscripts, which are in a relatively good condition. The *Gospel of John* is only attested in a recently discovered fragment of the collection of the Petrie Museum (UC 71048),[27] but no possessive construction can be found in this text. However, the *Gospel of Matthew* has been preserved in two Mesokemic codices, in Codex Scheide (Schenke 1981) and in Codex Schøyen (Schenke 2001).[28]

   Shisha-Halevy (1983: 317-318) makes some linguistic observations with respect to the distribution of possessive constructions in Codex Scheide. He rightly observes that "the interplay of «*pi- nte-*» and «*p- n-*», so characteristic of Bohairic is absent here (indeed, only *p- nte-* occurs

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[27] The Middle Egyptian *John* fragment has been discovered and published by Christian Askeland in the Petrie Musuem, London. According to the editor, its language is very close to that of Codex Schøyen. For the transcription and the analysis of the text, see Askeland (2012: 148-155).

[28] The examination of the data was facilitated by the excellent indices of both Mesokemic codices. For a collation, P. Bodmer XIX was used (published by Kasser 1962). Although the manuscript is not complete, the text can be dated to the same period.

in M – a typically Fayyumic construction)." He also claims that *nte-* constructions signify appurtenance and affiliation rather than possession "admitting that "after *ou-, ø- and… nim)* this is non-pertinent, since *nte-* is conditioned" thus the "opposition with *n-* is maintained only after a *p*-determined noun".

In Shisha-Halevy's semantically based account, the use of *nte-* expresses affiliation, location, consistence, which might be true for some of the examples he quotes, but the same type of relationship also characterizes several other phrases displaying Pattern A. According to my observations, the use of *nte-* is syntactically motivated in the majority of the cases. It is used when the head noun is already possessed by a possessive article (e.g. 26:28), is modified by a demonstrative (or a reinforced demonstrative as in 24:14, see (35) below), is modified or quantified in an attributive construction (e.g. 19:28) or by a relative clause (e.g. 10:6). It is also used when the construction is split, i.e., the members of the construction are separated by other elements of the sentence (23:35); or when the possessive construction serves as a predicative complement (23:15).

Moreover, *nte-* has an extremely low proportion opposed to about 500 tokens of Pattern A in these texts. Out of the 20 cases that can be found in Codex Scheide, 13 are syntactically motivated. It is highly improbable that the remaining seven cases should be explained by complex semantic characterizations that Shisha-Halevy (1983) proposes. Codex Schøyen displays a similar proportion of *nte-*constructions, but, interestingly, the unmotivated cases appear elsewhere in the text. Otherwise the two manuscripts agree, except for the predicative contexts (e.g. 23:15), where variation can be observed.

The use of Pattern A is subject to the syntactic rules established for Sahidic above, and is completely regular in these two codices. Moreover, Sahidic texts always present one or two counter-examples, but no such "irregularity" has been found in the Mesokemic Gospels. For instance, at Matthew 24:14 in Horner's Sahidic edition, one of the rules has been violated, since the linking element *n-* was used after a deictically determined noun (34). In the corresponding *locus* in Codex Scheide (35) the linking element *nte-* is attested. (P. Bodmer XIX has Pattern A, but there is no demonstrative on the head noun.)

(34)  ⲛ̅ⲥⲉⲧⲁϣⲉⲟⲉⲓϣ          ⲙ̅ⲡⲉⲓⲉⲩⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲓⲟⲛ        ⲛ̅ⲧⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲧⲉⲣⲟ
     n-se-tašeoeiš          m-pei-euaggelion      n-t-mntero
     CONJ-3PL-preach       ACC-DEM:M.SG-gospel   POSS-DEF:F.SG-kingdom
     'and will be preached this gospel of the kingdom'          (Matt 24:14, Horner)

(35)  ⲥⲉⲛⲉⲕⲏⲣⲩⲥⲥⲉ           ⲙ̅ⲡⲉⲓⲉⲩⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲓⲟⲛ        ⲡⲉⲓ        ⲛ̅ⲧⲉⲧⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲧⲉⲣⲁ
     se-ne-kêrusse          m-pei-euaggelion      pei        nte-t-mntera
     3PL-FUT-preach         ACC-DEM:M.SG-gospel   DEM:M.SG   PGEN-DEF:F.SG-kingdom
     'and will be preached this gospel of the kingdom'          (Matt 24:14, C. Scheide)


## 3.5 Dialect W

Dialect W is known from a single manuscript that contains a longer section of the *Gospel of John* (6:11 – 15:11) in P. Mich 3521 (Husselman 1962), but its reading is encumbered by numerous lacunae.[29] The dialect was claimed to be related to the standardized literary Fayyumic in the text edition (Husselman 1962: 11), although Kahle (1954: 224-227) previously described it as Middle Egyptian with Fayyumic influence. The vocalization generally corresponds to Fayyumic, with

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[29] Where parts of words and phrases are absent in the source, data were only used if the editor's reconstructions are safe enough, due to the physical context (i.e., the lacuna is not on the edge and the length of the missing part is informative). For a list of the possessive constructions found in this dialect, see the contrastive table in Egedi (2012: 143-144).

some exceptions: in this variety there is no lambdacism, and double vowels are also rare. The use of the Perfect conjugation base ϩⲁ- *ha-* is to be noted, as normally this is one of the distinctive features of Mesokemic.

Out of the 24 possessive constructions found in this manuscript, only one contains the linking element *nte-* (7:37). The use of this *nte-* is syntactically motivated: the possessed noun has another adnominal modifier (37). All other constructions follow Pattern A (36). Accordingly, dialect W seems to present the Sahidic-type distribution, therefore it can be related to Mesokemic rather than to early Fayyumic.

(36)  ⲛⲉϩⲃⲏⲓ̈         ⲛ̄ⲁⲃⲣⲁϩⲁⲙ
     ne-hbêui        n-abraham
     DEF:PL-thing.PL   POSS-Abraham
     'the works of Abraham'                                                      (John 8:39)

(37)  ⲡϩⲁⲉ]        ⲛ̄ϩⲁⲟⲩ   ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲡⲛⲁϭ         [ⲛ̄ϣⲉⲓ
     p-hae        n-haou   nte-p-nac        n-šei
     DEF:M.SG-last   ADJZ-day   PGEN-DEF:M.SG-large   ADJZ-feast
     'the last day of the great feast'                                              (John 7:37)

An exceptional phenomenon can be attested in (10:1) where the article *ti-* combines with the linking element *n-* (38). This corresponds to a pattern *\*pi-... n-*, the existence of which has been denied even in Bohairic. This data is also challenging in a general sense, as the dialect is not characterized by *pi-*determination otherwise (there are only two tokens of the series in plural).

(38)  ϯⲁⲩⲗⲏ        ⲛ̄ⲛⲉ[ⲥⲁⲩ
     ti-aulê        n-n-esay
     DEF:F.SG-fold   POSS-DEF:PL-sheep
     'the fold of the sheep'                                                         (John 10:1)

## 3.6 Early Fayyumic

The grammatical system of Fayyumic has been shortly discussed in Till (1930), but his observations are completely based on late (classical) Fayyumic sources. Till lists three types of possessive constructions, two of which rather correspond to compounding and attributive constructions, respectively. Presenting the third type, he claims that possessives with *nte-* are quite frequent in Fayyumic, just as in Bohairic.

Early Fayyumic (F4) texts are few, and they are all very fragmentary. A manuscript from the British Museum (BM Or. 5707 published by Crum and Kenyon 1900) contains a short section from the *Gospel of John* (3,5-4,49), in which 16 possessive constructions can be identified.[30] Out of these constructions, 11 display *nte-*. The proportion of the linking element *nte-* in the text is almost seventy percent (68.75 %), which approximates the proportion attested in P. Bodmer III. Out of these eleven cases, 3 are syntactically motivated (e.g., (39)), which means that in the remaining cases that are simple definite context the ratio between the *p-... n-* pattern (40) and the *p-... nte-* pattern (41) is 5:8. The lexemes occurring in Pattern A are practically of the same type as those attested in P. Bodmer III (ϣⲏⲗⲓ *šêli* 'son', ⲗⲉⲛ *len* 'name', ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ *matʰêtês* 'disciple', and finally ⲥⲉϩ *seh* 'teacher').

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[30] The data collected in a contrastive table can be found in Egedi (2012: 145).

(39) ⲟⲩⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ      ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲥⲁⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ
     ou-polis         nte-t-samaria
     INDF:SG-town    PGEN-DEF:F.SG-Samaria
     'a town of Samaria'                               (John 4:5)

(40) ⲛ̄ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ      ⲛⲓⲱⲁⲛⲛⲏⲥ
     n-mat^hêtês      n-iôannês
     DEF:PL-disciple    POSS-John
     'the disciples of John'                           (John 3:25)

(41) ⲧⲙⲉⲧⲣ̄ⲣⲁ      ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲫϯ
     t-metrra         nte-p^h-<nou>ti
     DEF:F.SG-kingdom    PGEN- DEF:M.SG-god
     'the kingdom of God'                             (John 3:5)

There are additional small fragments reported to belong to the F4 variety. For instance, two short passages from the *Acts* (7:14-28 and 9:28-39) in BM Or. 6948 (Gaselee 1909), in which ten possessive constructions can be found in total. Six of them display the *p-... n-* pattern and four present the *p-... nte-* pattern. It is remarkable, that no *pi-... nte-* pattern has been attested in this manuscript. Another short section from the *Gospel of John* (1,1-14) has been preserved in Berlin P. 5569 (Funk 1988). However, the fragment only has four possessive constructions in total, out of which three display *nte-*. One of these three occurrences is syntactically motivated (1:14), and one of them (1:12) appears in a predicative context.

Of course, such a low rate of occurrences cannot be diagnostic. Nevertheless, even on the basis of these fragments, it can be observed that the early Fayyumic texts rather follow the distribution that characterizes Bohairic. Moreover, the high proportion of pattern *p-... nte-* relates this variety more to early Bohairic, which is remarkable.[31]

## 3.7 Dialect V4

Finally, it is worth considering an additional Middle Egyptian variety. P. Mich 3520 contains Biblical texts (*Ecclesiastes, 1 John, 2 Peter*) written in the so-called V4 dialect. This idiom is considered to be a subdialect of early Fayyumic (F4), although it is said to have been heavily influenced by Sahidic (Schenke & Kasser 2003).

The text has surprisingly low number of occurrences of *nte-*. The proportion of *nte-*constructions is only 14.45% in the manuscript, which considerably diverges from the percentages observed in the Fayyumic varieties above. However, this proportion is still twice as much as the one attested in the Sahidic-type dialects, in which the use of Pattern B is principally syntactically motivated.

*Table 5. Possessive constructions in P. Mich. 3520*

| | |
|---|---|
| Possessive constructions in the corpus | 166 |
| Patterns with *nte-* | 24 |
| Proportion of patterns with *nte-* in the text | 14.45% |

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[31] Checking the online edition of classical Fayyumic text at the website of *The International Greek New Testament Project* (http://www.igntp.org/) also had interesting results: these later Fayyumic sources seem to have a lower proportion of *nte-* patterns, namely 57%. This proportion is much closer to the one attested in classical Bohairic.

Interestingly, the texts of P. Mich 3520 provide abundant examples that form a minimal pair to show that in unconditioned syntactic environments (simple definite posssesed noun) there is a completely free variation between the two patterns, irrespectively of the fact whether the possessee is a relational concept.

(42)  ⲛⲉⲛϣⲉϫⲓ        ⲛ̄ⲛⲥⲟⲫⲟⲥ
      nen-šeči        n-n-sop^hos
      DEF:PL-word     POSS-DEF:PL-wise
      'the words of the wise'                              (Eccl 9:17)

(43)  ⲛⲉⲛⲥⲉϫⲓ        ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲛⲓⲥⲁⲃⲏⲟⲩ
      nen-seči        nte-ni-sabêou
      DEF:PL-word     PGEN-DEF:PL-wise
      'the words of the wise'                              (Eccl 12:11)

(44)  ⲛⲓⲧⲁⲙⲓⲁ        ⲙ̄ⲫϯ
      ni-tamia        m-p^h-<nou>ti
      DEF:PL-work     POSS-DEF:M.SG-god
      'the works of God'                                   (Eccl 7:13)

(45)  ⲛⲓⲧⲁⲙⲓⲁ        ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲫϯ
      ni-tamia        nte-p^h-<nou>ti
      DEF:PL-work     PGEN-DEF:M.SG-god
      'the works of God'                                   (Eccl 11:5)


# 4 Conclusion

This chapter studied the adnominal possessive constructions in the early dialects of Coptic in a descriptive and comparative way. It has been shown that the distribution of the patterns is mainly subject to syntactic rules in one group of the dialects: in Sahidic, in literary Lycopolitan, in Akhmimic and Mesokemic. In another group of dialects, basically the northern varieties, semantic and lexical features of the possessed nouns also influence the choice between the strategies. This grammatical diversity results in a remarkable proportional difference between the attestations of the patterns in the two main groups as well.

The systematic comparison of early Bohairic with classical Bohairic has revealed a significant divergence in their use of *nte*-constructions, which raises important questions with respect to the relationship between these two varieties. The so-called "Middle Coptic major group" (cf. Kasser 1991), consisting of closely related varieties, also turned out to be quite heterogeneous in this respect: the early Fayyumic fragments show a similar distribution of the patterns to what can be found in Bohairic, whereas dialect W is close to Mesokemic and Sahidic in the grammar of possessive structures. Dialect V4 occupies a somewhat transitional position, as the preliminary studies showed: the proportion of *nte*-constructions is higher than it would be expected if purely syntactic factors determined the variation between the patterns; at the same time, this proportion does not reach the rates attested in the northern dialects.

If one looks at these data from a diachronic point of view, it seems reasonable to assume that the new strategy (the *nte*-construction) emerged to express marked (i.e., non-prototypical) possessive relationships, such as the one with an indefinite possessee. As the new strategy expanded, the older, unmarked construction (Pattern A) became more restricted, first syntactically (as the Sahidic distribution shows), later also semantically (as it can be observed in

Bohairic and Fayyumic). Of course, the Sahidic-type dialects cannot be considered to present an earlier stage of the language; likewise, the Bohairic-type dialects cannot be regarded as a later development. The situation can rather be characterized by assuming that the northern dialects continue a variety of Egyptian in which the grammatical change of possessive constructions (with a more restricted use of Pattern A) had already taken place in the pre-Coptic period.

The present comparative survey has been restricted to the literary register of Biblical texts. Future investigations are to be extended into two main directions. On the one hand, it would be important to fill the gap and to explore the use of the possessive constructions in the Nag Hammadi codices, whose grammatical systems are reported to present several peculiar features. On the other hand, examining the distribution of the patterns in the documentary material might contribute to our better knowledge of later developments of Coptic, especially with respect to the relationship between the nominal syntax of the southern (Sahidic type) vernacular and that of the northern (basically Fayyumic) one.

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## Abbreviations used in the glosses

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | first person |
| 2 | second person |
| 3 | third person |
| ACC | accusative / direct object marker |
| ADJZ | adjectivizer |
| CAUS | causative |
| COP | copula |
| CONJ | conjunctive |
| DEF | definite article |
| DEM | demonstrative |
| EXIST | existential |
| FUT | future |
| IPFV | imperfective |
| INDF | indefinite article |
| INF | infinitive |
| NEG | negative |

| | |
|---|---|
| PL | plural |
| POSS | possessive |
| PST | past |
| REL | relative |
| SBRD | subordinating particle/prefix |
| SG | singular |
| SP | sentence particle |
| STAT | stative/qualitative |
| THMZ | thematizer |