

Stem allomorphy, verb movement and Case assignment in Coptic Egyptian

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses some core phenomena surrounding conditioned stem allomorphy in Coptic Egyptian.^{1,2} Akin to other Afro-Asiatic languages, the Coptic lexicon is organized around consonantal roots like *m-s* ‘bear’, which give rise to (at most) four stem allomorphs.³ Compare:

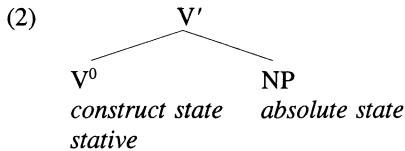
- (1) a *eta-u-mas* *Isaak* *pe-f-še:ri* *na-f*
Pf2-3p-bear_{nom} Isaak df:sm-3sm-boy for-3sm
‘After they had born his child Isaak to him ...’^B (Gen 21:3)
- b *mpat-u-mast-f*
Term-3p-bear_{pro}-3sm
‘Before they bore him (before he was born) ...’^S (MG 25:1)
- c *a-u-misi* *m-Mou:se:s*
Aor-3p-bear_{abs} of-Moses
‘They gave birth to Moses.’^B (Ac 7:20)
- d *ere-n-ġaġ* *mose* *n-he:t-u:*
P2-df:p-sparrow bear_{st} in-body-3p
‘When the sparrows are born inside them...’ (Ps 103:17)

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² *Coptic Egyptian* is the youngest stage of the Egyptian language (attested from the 4th c. AD), which demonstrates a considerable amount of lexical and grammatical borrowing from Greek (Greek loans are indicated by small caps in the examples). Coptic is split up into several dialect varieties, most prominently *Sahidic* (S), *Bohairic* (B), *Fayyûmic* (F), *Achmîmic* (A), and *Subachmîmic Coptic* (A²), indicated by superscripts in the examples. Although the various Coptic dialects are not coordinate (the earliest Sahidic examples date from the 5th c. AD, the latest Bohairic examples date from the 11th c. AD), they mainly differ from one another phonologically.

³ In the glosses, the diverse stem allomorphs are marked as *nom* (nominal state), *pro* (pronominal state), *abs* (absolute state), *st* (stative), *cs* (construct state). Person-number-gender agreement morphemes are indicated by Arabic numbers for person (1, 2, or 3), *f* (feminine) and *m* (masculine) for gender, and *s* (singular) and *p* (plural) for number. The definite and indefinite article is indicated by *df* and *indf*, respectively. Language specific tense/aspect/mood markers are abbreviated as *PF2* (Second Perfect), *Term* (Terminative), *Aor* (Aorist), *P2* (Second Present), *Opt* (Optative), *Temp* (Temporals), *Pret* (Preterite), *Fut1* (First Future), *Fut2* (Second Future), *Conj* (Conjunctive). Other abbreviation used in this article are *nom.pfx* (nominalizer prefix), *poss.pfx* (possessive prefix).

(1) illustrates that the various stem allomorphs are derivationally related through the consonant melody of the root morpheme *m-s*, but formally distinguished through vowel change (apophony) and syllabification.⁴ Traditional Coptic grammarians have always assumed that only the stative stem allomorph is a fully fledged verb, whereas the non-stative stems are analyzed as verbal nouns (infinitives) that may have a verbal or a nominal function. The absolute and construct states (i.e. the nominal and pronominal state allomorphs) are said to differ from one another other with respect to surface valency: the absolute state is supposed to be an intransitive predicate, while the construct state is considered to be a transitive predicate (cf. Steindorff 1951:105-6, §§ 219-24 for a representative view).⁵ These surface facts receive a natural explanation, if the root morpheme is projected either as a verb or as a noun. When the root is projected under a verbal node, it will be categorially specified as a verb and surfaces as the construct state allomorph in the active and as the stative allomorph in the passive voice. When the root is projected under the complement position of the verb, it will be specified as a noun and surfaces as the absolute state stem allomorph:



The categorial features of the individual Coptic stem allomorphs appear from their case-assigning properties and their syntactic mobility. I will show in the next section that the absolute state is purely nominal in character and fails to assign accusative case to its internal argument. Section 3 demonstrates that the construct state — being a verb — is capable of assigning accusative case to its complement in a Spec-Head configuration in the Agr-O domain. Section 4 completes the survey of Coptic stem allomorphy by discussing the passive properties of the stative.

⁴ Like other Afro-Asiatic languages, Coptic exhibits some stem specific irregularities, such as the presence of an inchoative stem allomorph in some trilateral roots, e.g. *mu:kh* 'make sad', *mkah* 'become sad' and *mokh* 'be sad'. This idiosyncratic behaviour, however, is not relevant for the present discussion.

⁵ In the context of this paper, the nominal and pronominal states will be treated on a par as the construct state (*cs* in the glosses), despite the stem specific differences of these allomorphs in epenthesized and causative verbs (see Steindorff 1951:107-8 §§ 225, 227 for a careful description of the facts). To account for the complementary distribution between the nominal and pronominal state, I analyze the personal affixes of the pronominal state as unincorporated pronouns, which cliticise to the verbal stem at PF (see Baker & Hale 1990 for some discussion).

2. *The Absolute State*

In this section, I will corroborate the traditional view that the absolute state has the morphological structure of a noun. I differ from the traditional analysis, however, in that I take the absolute state to be always a noun, even where it apparently functions as a verb. Consider the following list of absolute state marked unergative verbs and their homophonous nominal counterparts:

(3)	<i>Root</i>	<i>Noun</i>	<i>Verb</i>	
	n-b	ne:be	ne:be	‘swim, to swim’
	s-ġ-m	so:tem	so:tem	‘obedience, to listen to’
	w-š-d	wo:št	wo:št	‘kiss, to kiss’

The simplest account for the formal identity between nouns and verbs in the unergative class is to say that they both are nouns. How come, then, that the noun can function as a verb? It is implicitly assumed in traditional grammar that the absolute state nominal has undergone zero-derivation, whenever it functions as a verb. That is, the absolute state noun undergoes a category change $N \rightarrow V$ without overt morphological marking. There is, however, empirical evidence in this language that no such derivational process is involved:

- (4) a *anok ho: ti-na-er bo:k m-p-GENOS n-ni-ro:me*
 I myself 1s-Fut1-do_{cs} go_{abs} of-df:sm-race of-df:p-man
 ‘And I myself, I will visit all the people.’^B (Pach. 5:9-10)
- b *n-ta p-K^hristos GAR an bo:k ehu:n*
 neg-PF2 df:sm-Christ pcl not go_{abs} inside
 ‘Christ had not gone inside.’^S (Hebr. 9:24)

It appears that Coptic unergatives can be constructed periphrastically with the overt light-verb *eire* ‘do’, as in (4a), or analytically without there being an overt verb, as in (4b). I take this to mean that in (4b) the light-verb lacks phonological content. What we are dealing with is an allomorphic opposition between an overt and a covert form of the light verb *eire* ‘do’. Dependent on the dialect, either allomorph is selected:

- (5) a *male-f-el APOLOGIZE ne:-s*
 Opt-3sm-do_{cs} defend_{abs} to-3sf
 ‘He may defend her.’^F (Agath. 6a:28-b1)
- b *ME: ere-t-a-PSYCHE: na-HYPOTASSE an*
 Q Fut2-df:sf-1s-soul Fut2-submit_{abs} not
 ‘Won’t my soul have done submission?’^S (Ps 61:1)

Greek verbs are always borrowed as nouns, which may function as verbs, once they are embedded into a light-verb construction. As shown by (4b), Sahidic Coptic has a preference for the null allomorph, while the Fayyûmic variety favours the overt variant (4a) (Till 1955:142-3 § 280). This raises the question whether the root noun of Sahidic unergatives incorporates into the null verb at the lexical level, which seems to be the case in the English unergative class (see Hale & Keyser 1993, and the references cited therein), or whether the unergative preserves its transitive structure, which seems to be the case in the other Coptic dialects. If the noun were incorporated into the null verb in Sahidic unergatives, one might expect that the trace of the incorporated noun is occasionally spelled out as a cognate object. Although Coptic unergatives may have cognate objects, these are never licensed in the position adjacent to the verb:

- (6) a *a-s-rime* *hn-u:-rime* *e-našo:-f*
 Aor-3sf-cry_{abs} in-indf:s-weep_{abs} COMP-be big_{cs}-3sm
 ‘She cried in a crying, which was enormous.’^S (Berl.Gnost. 46:14-5)
- b *ho:b* *DE* *n-ne-f-er* *ho:b*
 work_{abs} pcl neg-Pret-3sm-do_{cs} work_{abs}
 ‘Work, he didn’t do.’^B (Num 8:26)

Cognate objects such as *rime* ‘crying’ and *ho:b* ‘work’ may not appear in the complement position of the unergative verb, but occur either in an extraclassical position, as in (5b), or as prepositional complements, as in (5a). This can be accounted for immediately, if the complement position of the verb has already been occupied by the root noun in the absolute state, suggesting that even if the null allomorph of the light-verb is selected, unergatives may remain overtly transitive at the lexical level:⁶

- (7) [_{VP} Spec [_V [_{V0} *er_{cs}* / ϕ_V] [_{NP} *ho:b_{abs}*]]]

Let me show now that the transitive structure of Coptic unergatives underlies the absolute state of transitive verbs as well. It has already been observed by traditional grammarians that unergatives can only occur in the absolute state (Till 1955:126 §258). I take this selectional restriction to mean that unergatives and the absolute state are defined on the same syntactic configuration. In this respect, it does not come as a surprise that the absolute state of a transitive verb demonstrates the same homophony between verbs and nouns:

⁶ Under certain conditions, noun incorporation of the absolute state into the null verb may take place at a syntactic level, which will be discussed in section 3. From this it follows that cognate objects are projected into the structure before syntactic noun incorporation has taken place.

(8)	<i>Root</i>	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Noun</i>	
	m-s	mise	mise	'give birth/ birth'
	š-n	šine	šine	'examine/examination'
	s-p	sopsp	sopsp	'require, request'

Akin to unergatives, the absolute state of transitive verbs exhibits the same opposition between periphrastic and analytic light-verb constructions:

- (9) a *a-ei-χo:pe* *e-ei-sapsp* *mma-f ŷe*
 Aor-1s-happen_{abs} to-do_{cs}-beg_{abs} of-3sm that
 'I started to beseech him that...' ^A (Els. 7:19-8:1)
- b *ti-sapsp* *mma-k ŷe*
 1s-beseech_{abs} of-2sm that
 'I beseech you that...' ^A (Els. 8:4)

Finally, the transitive structure of absolute state forces cognate objects to be embedded under a locative preposition, as in:

- (10) *hn-u:-ko:* *eke-ko:* *hi-ŷo:k* *n-u:-ARXO:N*
 in-indf:s-place_{abs} Fut2-2sm-place_{abs} for-execute_{abs} of-indf:s-ruler
 'In a placing, you will be placed for execution of rulership.' ^S
 (Dt 17:15)

Since the absolute state of transitive verbs patterns with unergatives in every respect, it may be deduced that this stem allomorph is projected as the nominal complement of a light-verb construction as well. This implies that the absolute state of both transitives and unergatives have the morphological structure of nouns. The absolute state nominal of transitive roots may take an internal argument by itself, as in example (11) below, but observe that this argument is governed by the athematic preposition *n* 'of':

- (11) *a-s-misi* *nŷe-Sarra* *n-u:-še:ri* *n-Abraam*
 Aor-3sf-bear_{abs} by-Sara of-indf:s-child for-Abraham
 'She had given birth of a child for Abraham, namely Sara.' ^B (Gen 21:2)

Although the absolute state noun is an appropriate theta-assigner, it fails to case-mark its internal argument, which necessitates the spell-out of the dummy case-assigner *n* 'of'. The Coptic example in (11), then, is the exact counterpart of its English translation, where the NP *a child* is the genitive case-marked object of the nominal complement of a light verb. The configuration underlying (11) is partially represented below:

- (12) [_{VP} Spec [_V ϕ_V [_{NP} [_{N'} [_{N0} *mise*_{abs} [_{PP} *n-u:-še:ri*]]]]]]]

3. The Construct State/Absolute State Alternation

So far, we have seen that the absolute state allomorph is purely nominal in character. What I want to show in this section is (i) that the construct state allomorph is a verbal category and therefore capable of assigning accusative case to its complement, (ii) that the accusative case features of the direct object are checked in the specifier position of the AGR-O projection, and (iii) that the raising of the direct object in this position is contingent on the movement of the verb to the head of the AGR-O projection. Consider the following sentences, which are semantic paraphrases of each other:

- (13) a *n-ta p-noute GAR tnneu pe-f-še:re an*
 neg-PF2 df:sm-god pcl send_{cs} df:sm-3sm-child not
 ‘The Lord has not sent his child.’^S (Jo 3:17)
- b *n-eta p^h-nu.ti GAR an wo:rp m-pe-f-še:ri*
 neg-PF2 df:sm-god pcl not send_{abs} of-df:sm-3sm-child
 ‘The Lord has not send his child.’^B (Jo 3:17)

(13a) illustrates that the construct state *tnneu* ‘send’ requires the adjacency of the direct object *pe-f-še:re* ‘his son’. Observe that both constituents move beyond the post-negation *an* ‘not’, while the absolute state *wo:rp* ‘send’ and the genitival PP *m-pe-f-še:ri* ‘of his son’ in (13b) remain in their base-position and don’t move. Significantly, the $V_{cs} \wedge NP_{OB}$ complex never follows the postnegation *an*:

- (14) a NEG-AUX NP_{SU} pcl V_{cs} NP_{OB} AN
 b NEG-AUX NP_{SU} pcl AN V_{abs} PP
 c *NEG-AUX NP_{SU} pcl AN V_{cs} NP_{OB}

A similar patterns obtains in the case of the emphatic particle *DE*. The construct state marked verb and its object move across the particle *DE*, while the absolute state nominal and its associated PP don’t move outside their base domain:

- (15) a *a-u-ĵem u:-rome DE mmay*
 Aor-3:p-find_{cs} indf:sm-man pcl there
 ‘They found somebody there.’^B (Ac 9:33)
- b *a-t-ef-so:ne DE o:l n-n-ef-kees*
 Aor-df:sf-3sm-sister pcl bring_{abs} of-df:p-3sm-bones
 ‘His sister brought his bones.’^S (Mena 4a:1-2)

Again, there is no evidence that the $V_{cs} \wedge NP_{OB}$ complex may remain in the postfield of the particle *DE*:

- (16) a AUX NP_{SU} V_{cs} NP_{OB} DE
 b AUX NP_{SU} DE V_{abs} PP
 c *AUX NP_{SU} DE V_{cs} NP_{OB}

Floating quantifiers and other stranded constituents provide further evidence for head movement of the construct state verb. Some particularly clear cases are:

- (17) a *eta-u-sen t-NE:SOS DE te:r-s*
 PF2-3p-pass_{cs} df:sf-island pcl all-3sf
 'After they had passed the entire island ...'^S (Ac 13:6)
 b *a-p-me:e:še DE n-t-POLIS po:š*
 Aor-df:sm-crowd pcl of-df:sf-city split.up_{abs}
 'The crowd of the city split up.'^S (Ac 14:4)
 c *f-na-ŷi tipe an m-mu:*
 3:s:m-Fut1-take_{cs} taste not of death
 'He will not taste death.'^S (Ev.Th. 84:16-7)

Coptic quantifiers are composed of the head noun *te:r* 'all' and a possessive affix, which resumes the ϕ -feature content of the antecedent NP. Thus, the floating quantifier *te:r-s* 'all-3sf' in (17a) indicates the base-position of the antecedent NP *t-ne:sos* 'the island', which is the direct object of the construct state verb *sen* 'pass' (cf. Sportiche 1988 and Koopman & Sportiche 1991 for the relevance of floating quantifiers as indicators of syntactic positions). The synchrony of verb movement of the construct state and object raising also appears from their position relative to the emphatic particle *DE*. In (17b-c), the stranded possessor NPs *n-t-polis* 'of the city' and *m-mu:* 'of death' indicate the base-position of the VP internal subject and the direct object, respectively. Now, observe that only the subject *p-me:še* 'the crowd' moves past the particle *DE* in (17b), whereas the absolute state *po:š* 'split up' and the phonologically null light verb remain in their base-position. In (17c), on the other hand, the overt light verb *ŷi* 'take' and its nominal complement *tipe* 'taste' move together beyond the postnegation *an* leaving the possessor NP *m-mu:* 'of death' behind. The resulting paradigm is represented below:

- (18) a AUX NP_{SU} V_{cs} NP_{OB} FQ
 b AUX NP_{SU} V_{cs} NP_{OB} NP_{possess}
 c *AUX NP_{SU} FQ V_{cs} NP_{OB}
 d *AUX NP_{SU} NP_{possess} V_{cs} NP_{OB}

The word order facts discussed so far tell us two things. First, Coptic Egyptian is like French in that the finite verb moves to Tense in overt syntax (Pollock 1989). Second, since the construct state requires adjacency, the direct object also moves from its base position to a higher functional projection, which is immediately

dominated by Tense. In line with Chomsky (1991), I will take this projection to be the object agreement phrase AGR-OP. Now, observe that under Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990), we wouldn't expect the raising of the object to the specifier position of the AGR-O projection to be a licit movement operation, since it skips a potential landing site, namely the VP internal subject position. Notice, however, that the NP movement of the direct object is contingent on the overt movement of the construct state verb to the Agr-O domain. The synchrony of verb movement and object raising in Coptic Egyptian receives a natural explanation, if one adopts Chomsky's (1993) formulation of 'shortest move'. What the shortest move condition comes down to is that A-movement is strictly local, unless it occurs in the domain of head movement, in which case one and only one specifier position may be skipped. This revised version of Minimality is defined in the following way (p.17):

- (19) If α , β are in the same minimal domain, they are equidistant from γ

The equidistant principle in (19) defines Minimality such that the moved constituent γ may skip a potential landing site β and move on to α , if both positions are in the same minimal domain. The relevant minimal domains are furnished by head-chains, which contain both the source and the target of the movement operation (Chomsky 1993:10-13). Thus, if the verb moves to the head of the Agr-O projection, it creates a minimal domain containing two specifier positions, viz. [Spec, VP] and [Spec, AGR-OP], which are equidistant from each other. For this reason, both positions may serve as landing sites for the direct object. Since the former specifier position is occupied by the VP internal subject, the direct object is free to move to the specifier position of the AGR-O projection, where its accusative case features are checked. Minimality thus defined predicts that overt object raising will be possible only in the context of overt verb raising (Chomsky 1993:18), which is what is going on in Coptic Egyptian. With this in mind, reconsider example (17a), repeated as (20), and its underlying derivation in (21a-b):

- (20) *eta-u-sen t-NE:SOS DE te:r-s*
 PF2-3p-pass_{cs} df:sf-island pcl all-3sf
 'After they had passed the entire island, ...'^s (Ac 13:6)

- (21) a [CP ... [AGR-SP ... [TP ... [AspP ... [AGR-OP ... [VP ...]]]]]]
 b [AspP SU [Asp' [Asp0 [V⁰ + AGR-O⁰]_i + Asp⁰] [AGR-OP OB ti [VP Pcl [VP t_{SU} t_V t_{OB}]]]]]]

In (21), the verb movement of the construct state to the head of the AGR-O projection licenses the A-movement of the object to the specifier position, where its accusative case features are checked in a Spec-Head configuration. In turn, the subsequent movement of AGR-O⁰ to the head of the Aspect projection 'frees' the A-movement of the VP internal subject past the [Spec,AGR-OP] position to

[Spec,AspP]. From there on, no equidistance problems arise, since the movement of the subject to [Spec,TP] and [Spec,Agr-SP] for nominative case-checking is strictly local. Finally, notice that after landing in Asp⁰, the verbal complex undergoes subsequent movement to T⁰, AGR-S⁰ and C⁰.

Having discussed the synchrony of domain extending verb movement and object raising in the construct state, let us now come back to the case of the absolute state nominal. Consider an additional set of sample sentences containing unergative verbs:

- (22) a *a-u-r* *KATANTA* *te:r-u:*
 Aor-3p-do_{cs} come down_{abs} all-3p
 'They have all come down.'^S (Pl 588b, 49:10)
- b *n-eta* *p-K^hristos* *GAR* *an i* *eCu:n* *e-n-et-wab*
 neg-PF2 df:sm-god pcl not go_{abs} inside for-df:p-rel-be clean_{st}
 'Christ has not ascended for the pure ones.'^B (Hebr 9:24)
- c *ntare* *T^ho:mas* *DE ei* *ša-ne-f-šbeer*
 Temp Thomas pcl come_{abs} to-df:p-3sm-comrades
 'After Thomas had come to his comrades,...'^S (Ev.Th. 83:8-9)
- d *n-ta* *te[ei]-sme:* *ei* *en etbe:-t*
 neg-PF2 this:f-voice come_{abs} not because of-1s
 'This voice has not come for my sake.'^{A2} (Jo 12:49)

(22a) shows that whenever the overt light verb *eire* 'do' is selected, the absolute state noun *katana* 'go down' moves to the specifier of the AGR-O phrase, thereby skipping the VP internal subject position, as indicated by the floating quantifier *te:r-u* 'all-3p'. If the covert light-verb is chosen, the absolute state noun *ei* 'come' does not move beyond the postnegation *an* or the emphatic particle *de* in Sahidic and Bohairic Coptic, as in (22b-c), but does so in the Subachmimic variety, as in (22d).

It appears that periphrastic light-verb constructions exhibit the same synchronization of verb movement and object raising as transitive verbs. A somewhat different situation obtains in analytic light-verb constructions, however, since the absolute state nominal does not obligatorily move to [Spec,AGR-OP], as in the Sahidic and Bohairic examples. How come, then, that the immobility of the absolute state noun does not result in a case-filter violation since the absolute state NP cannot check off its accusative case features in the AGR-O domain? A possible answer is that the incorporation of the absolute state noun into the null verb is available as an alternative licensing mechanism. Following a suggestion of the reviewer, one might plausibly assume that the covert light-verb seeks phonetic content and accomplishes this by incorporating the absolute state nominal. Once the absolute state noun is incorporated, it is exempt from case checking (cf. Baker 1988:105-29 and Borer 1993 for some discussion).

Having swallowed the absolute state noun, the null verb in Subachmîmic Coptic has to move overtly in syntax to check its temporal and aspectual features, while its Sahidic and Bohairic Coptic may postpone feature checking to LF implying that the null verb in these varieties has weak features. This analysis compels one to the view that the parametrization of feature strength is not restricted to functional elements, but may apply to lexical elements as well.

Postponement of feature checking to LF can be overridden, if verb movement satisfies the morphological requirements of other constituents:

- (23) *nta-i-ei gar an haro-i mayaa-t*
 PF2-1s-come Pcl an for.sake-1s own-1s
 'I have not come for my own sake.'^S (Jo 7:28)

In (23), the pronominal subject is a clitic, which has to incorporate into a verbal head by PF. Without head movement of the $[_{V_0} \phi_V + NP_{abs}]$ complex to the head of the AGR-S phrase, the computation would crash at PF as a consequence of a stray affix filter violation. This shows that overt movement of the weak null verb is permitted (and forced) to guarantee the convergence of the entire derivation.

4. The Stative

To complete the picture of Coptic stem allomorphy, let us finally consider the stative, which will be analyzed as passive verb. This analysis differs substantially from the traditional view that Coptic Egyptian lacks passivization altogether as a grammatical function changing process (see e.g. Steindorff 1951:193 §404). However, if passivization is defined syntactically in terms of 'object-to-subject raising', the stative allomorph of the verb may very well count as the passive counterpart of the active construct state:

- (24) a *k-lobe Paule a-pe-howo-shai lebt -k*
 2sm-be crazy_{st} Paul Aor-df:sm-more-writing drive crazy_{cs}-2sm
 'You are driven crazy, Paul, too much writing made you crazy.'^S
 (Ac 26:24)
- b *ALLA HINA nte-pi-KOSMOS nohem ebol hi-tot-f*
 but such conj-df:sm-universe save_{st} out through-hand-3sm
 '... but that the universe is saved through him'^B (Jo 3:17)

(24a) shows that the pronominal subject of the stative verb *lobe* 'you are crazy' is the direct object of the causative verb *lebt* 'drive crazy'. While (24a) is an agentless passive, (24b) is a canonical passive, where the dethematized (pronominal) agent of the statal passive *nohem* 'be saved' is expressed through the PP *hi-tot-f* 'by him'. If the vowel melody of the stative is analysed as a

discontinuous passive morpheme, comparable to the one found in Semitic languages, then this stem allomorph meets the universal criteria of the passive, (i) the promotion of the D-structure object to the subject position, (ii) the demotion of the D-structure subject to an oblique position, (iii) a change in the morphology of the verb (see Perlmutter & Postal 1982). In line with the standard assumptions on passivization (Jaeggli 1986), I will assume the following configuration for the stative passive:

$$(25) \quad [{}_{\text{AGR-SP}} \text{NP}_i [{}_{\text{AGR-S}} [{}_{\text{AGR-SO}} [{}_{\text{ASp0}} \text{V}^0_{\text{ST}} + \text{Asp}^0]_j + \text{AGR-S}^0] [{}_{\text{ASpP}} \text{t}_i \text{t}_j [{}_{\text{VP}} [{}_{\text{V}} \text{t}_V \text{t}_i]]]]]]$$

Due to the unaccusativity of the stative verb, verb movement and subsequent object raising to the AGR-O domain is excluded. The only available position for case-checking is the specifier position of the AGR-S projection, where structural nominative case is checked in a Spec-Head configuration. Evidence for the head-movement of the stative verb to a higher functional projection comes from examples like (26a-b) below, where it moves across the postnegation *an* and the floating quantifier:

- (26) a *n-ere-nai gar tahe an*
 neg-P2-these pcl be drunk_{st} not
 'These are not drunk.'^S (Ac 2:15)
- b *e-u-se:h te:-ru: hiġn-p-a-k^hEIROGRAP^hE:*
 COMP-3p-write_{st} all-3p upon-df:sm-1s-manuscript
 'while they are all written upon my manuscript'^A (Els. 11:7-8)

The data considered so far illustrate that the stative is somewhere in the middle between an adjectival and a verbal passive. The verbal reading obtains in the stative form of causative verbs, as in (24a), and whenever a dethematized agent is present, as in (24b). The adjectival passive reading is clearly present in examples like (26a-b), where the stative has a resultative connotation. At present, it is not clear how these different readings of the stative should be accounted for. Since the stative passive is morphologically marked through inflectional morphology (vowel change), an analysis does not seem to be feasible that crucially relies on the lexicon-syntax distinction (see Levin & Rappaport 1986 and much subsequent work). Clearly further research on this topic is needed, but for the syntactic focus of this paper it suffices to identify the stative with a morphological passive.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, the morpho-syntactic properties of the various Coptic stem allomorphs could be related to a very simple syntactic parameter, namely whether they are specified categorially as verbs or nouns. We have seen that the absolute state has the morphological structure of a noun, while the construct state and the stative have the morphological structure of verbs. Since nouns are not appropriate case-assigners, the internal argument of the absolute state nominal has to be governed by the genitival preposition *n* 'of' to escape from the case-filter. Unlike the absolute state nominal, the construct state marked verb is able to assign a case to its complement, but only when the verb moves to head of the AGR-O phrase is its direct object allowed to move to the specifier position of that projection to check off its accusative case features. In the case of null verbs, noun incorporation of the absolute state nominal serves as an alternative way of syntactically licensing the direct object. It appears, then, that the Coptic data provide relatively clear evidence for the synchrony between verb movement and object raising, as argued for in Chomsky (1993). Finally, the stative has been identified with a morphological passive, which is halfway between a verbal and an adjectival passive.

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