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Greek Causal discourse markers in Coptic letters. A case study on the pragmatics of code-switching

Elsa Oréal

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Eitan Grossman, Peter Dils,
Tonio Sebastian Richter & Wolfgang Schenkel (eds.)

Greek Influence on Egyptian-Coptic:
Contact-Induced Change in an Ancient African Language

Lingua Aegyptia
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Greek Causal Discourse Markers in Coptic Letters

A Case Study in the Pragmatics of Code-Switching

Elsa Oréal¹

1 Borrowability of discourse markers and conjunctions

In recent literature about contact-induced linguistic phenomena in living languages, discourse markers are now considered ‘easy to borrow’². This is a crucial point to keep in mind before turning to a case study concerning a dead language. Before the flourishing of contact linguistics, discourse markers were commonly thought to be a part of speech that would ‘resist’ borrowing. This view was somehow founded on the idea that conjunctions or discourse markers were function words, and that their borrowing would represent a case of structural/grammatical borrowing. But this need not be the case. In fact, the classification of discourse markers as function words in the strictest sense is open to debate³. Discourse markers like English *therefore*, *so*, *but*, have been considered content morphemes at the discourse level, because they assign discourse-level functions⁴. In any case, even if we accept that discourse markers are a (very special) kind of function words with a procedural meaning, this does not amount to saying that the borrowing of discourse markers represents a case of grammatical interference⁵.

In his study of the different processes that can lead to borrowing, Muysken (1999) has proposed a typology of code-mixing, according to which the use of conjunctions and discourse markers in bilingual settings belongs to the ‘alternation’ type. Numerous case studies also show that the borrowing of conjunctions and discourse markers starts out as codeswitching: thus, a discourse marker is used frequently in the embedded language in codeswitching, and then becomes an ‘established borrowing’ ‘when social conditions pro-

1 Langage, Langues et Cultures d’Afrique Noire (LLACAN), CNRS-Inalco, Paris (<Elsa.Oreal@cns.fr>). Thanks to Matthias Müller for his patient reading of this contribution. All remaining mistakes are mine.

2 As Muysken (1999: 232) states, “it is clear from a number of cases that words which play a peripheral role in sentence grammar, particularly the grammar of the recipient language, interjections, some types of adverbs, discourse markers and even sentence coordination markers, are borrowed relatively easily”.

3 Here is not the place to dwell upon this question, but it is relevant for our purposes to note it. Cf. Field (2002: 140).

4 Cf. e.g. Myers-Scotton (2006: 245).

5 This result has some impact on the way one looks at the case of Coptic-Greek contact. If indeed discourse markers are easy to switch and even to borrow, the use of borrowed discourse markers in Coptic does not as such point to the kind of deep interference that would result in a mixed language.

mote borrowing words from another language'⁶. A variety of reasons may explain the easy use of discourse markers in codeswitching:

- because it is an easy process from a morphosyntactical point of view⁷,
- because these words 'do not bind a variable'⁸,
- because they are frequent in discourse,
- because their function is something universal⁹.

Still, precisely because these 'discourse roles' seem to be something universal, one may ask what the motivation for borrowing discourse markers is. In the special case of discourse markers and connectors, philologists once used to be happy with the idea that 'primitive' languages borrowed this kind of words from more sophisticated ones¹⁰. Some modern linguists still make use of this explanation. In some cases, it may indeed be the case that the recipient language has not developed segmental means of expressing these 'discourse roles' that match, from a structural point of view, the category of discourse markers. In that case, foreign discourse markers would seem to fill an empty gap. But this is true from a segmental point of view only. Neglecting the function of prosody here biases any functional explanation. The 'gap-filling' explanation is not satisfactory because it does not fit with well-known situations¹¹. Alternative explanations see code-mixing as a contrastive device serving as a contextualization clue, like discourse markers themselves¹². A pragmatic motivation for borrowing discourse markers thus involves their sharing a basic function with code-mixing itself in discourse¹³.

2 Causal/explicative particles in the Kellis letters

Assessing the relevance of the pragmatic explanation for the use of Greek particles in Coptic needs fine-grained studies on different homogeneous corpora. Such studies are still lacking on a large scale. In a deliberately narrow-focus approach, we will thus propose a first restricted attempt in this direction. The letters from Kellis, for which a masterful edi-

6 Myers-Scotton (2006: 245).

7 Mougeon & Beniak 1991 explain this phenomenon as resulting from the fact that conjunctions and discourse markers "occur at prime switch points".

8 Myers-Scotton (1993: 201), on the example of Shona borrowing English *because* and *but*.

9 In spite of the fact that textual coherence is subject to cultural conventions, especially in writing, the ability to encode discourse relationships like cause, contrast or consequence seems to be a universal function of language, at least by means of suprasegmental devices.

10 Cf. Oréal 1999 on the Greek-Coptic case.

11 Muysken 1999 criticises his own earlier acceptance of this explanation regarding the case of Otomo/Spanish.

12 Cf. De Rooij 2000 on the Swahili/French case.

13 For a suggestive case study in this direction, cf. Maschler 2002. It shows how switched discourse markers and conjunctions underscore verbal activity, and describes a mixed code resulting from a bilingual situation involving Modern Hebrew and English. In this mixed code, Hebrew discourse markers are used to indicate conversational boundaries at the discourse level, while sentence-level conjunctions are in English.

tion is now available, offer us an interesting corpus of non-literary documents¹⁴. There are some difficulties in understanding the context of these letters, but the main argumentative moves remain clear enough in a number of cases. Moreover, we will focus on one specific point: causal/explicative discourse markers and conjunctions. A look at the global repertoire of Coptic vs. Greek discourse markers in this corpus shows that no ‘gap explanation’ is likely to account for the use of Greek particles in these texts. Do they reflect a different pragmatic situation than does the use of Coptic equivalents in this corpus? Before turning to the Greek particles proper, one example involving a manner adverb may illustrate what can be a pragmatic explanation as against a ‘filling-a-gap’ explanation:

Your son Titoue greets you warmly.

f-r-šeu tonu a-f-bôk abal a-t-henete hatn-p-iôt Pebôk

f-r-šeu kalôs

He is very well. He has gone to the monastery to be with father Pebok.

He is good and well. (pKellis 12, 6–7)

The Greek adverb *kalôs* ‘well’ is used when the same content is stated for the second time, while the first occurrence uses the Coptic *tonu*, thus showing that the switch to Greek aims to convey some additional expressive force.

2.1 Method and results

We have tried to find a common denominator at a pragmatic level that might account for the choice of such Greek forms as *gar* and *ep(e)idê*, *for*, *since*, as against Coptic forms like *je* or *etbe je*, *because*, *since*. In fact there seems to be a contrast between causal/explanatory *je* and:

- explanatory *gar* (in cases where their uses can be compared),
- causal *ep(e)idê*.

It may seem odd to compare an enclitic particle (*gar*) with conjunctions (*je* and *ep(e)idê*), but despite their syntactic disparity, they are complementary from a *functional* point of view, at least in this corpus:

- *je* functions at sentence level and introduces a clause that expresses asserted information, giving the cause of a preceding point. With *je*, the writer makes no implicit reference to the argumentative or polemical role of what is being said. Causal/explicative *je* is very common in the Kellis letters. It clearly represents the unmarked option for introducing an explanation.

14 See Gardner, Alcock & Funk (1999).

In contrast with this Coptic form, Greek *gar* and *ep(e)idê* appear to be used as marked options from a pragmatic point of view, both forms bearing a heteroglossic charge in the letters¹⁵:

- *gar* indicates that the writer assumes that the content of the clause is contrary to some expectation.
- *ep(e)idê* indicates that the writer assumes that the content of the clause is shared information that is asserted not only to inform the addressee but to underscore its status as an undebatable point in a more or less explicit argument.

Of course the syntax of these two Greek forms is different, since they do not occupy the same place in the clause; but they share the pragmatic feature of signalling that the writer considers the information as a point made in opposition to or in agreement with the addressee's assumed attitude. Thus, the use of *gar* and *ep(e)idê* makes sense only at the level of discourse.

Notice that *je*, as the neutral option, is almost always a possible choice, unless a very specific argumentative context makes it impossible to use a pragmatically neutral form. As a consequence, there is a certain overlap between the uses of causal *je* and some uses of *gar* or *ep(e)idê* – for in most contexts, there is nothing that makes it necessary for the writer to use a marked form rather than the neutral one. Thus one may always say 'you could also have had *je* here', but the point is to show that in all interpretable occurrences of *gar* and *ep(e)idê*, the proposed characteristic feature fits the context better. Sometimes it may even happen that the neutral choice does not fit the context at all, or at least sounds very odd, though this is always difficult to prove. Without going into a detailed study of the uses of *je*, it may suffice here to call attention to its descriptive (vs. polemical) character: *je* typically introduces new information stated in a neutral way, with no need to underscore its undebatable nature, nor to highlight its counter-expectational force. I also leave aside the question of the continuum in syntactic integration of *je*-clauses with the main verb, although this has some bearing on what I call its descriptive function as opposed to argumentative¹⁶.

2.2 Uses of *gar* in the Kellis letters

We need now to illustrate our claim about the pragmatic motivation of *gar* and *epeidê* in the Kellis corpus.

15 White (2003, 261) uses 'heteroglossic engagement' as a term denoting 'how the textual voice engages with alternative voices and positions and thereby actively represents the communicative context as one of heteroglossic diversity'. He introduces this literary concept into the linguistic field as a tool to conceptualize intersubjective positioning and its encoding strategies in language.

16 In fact, the link of a *je*-clause to the main predicate may be more or less tight, ranging along a continuum from completive *je* with verbs of saying to the more loosely bound "causal" *je*, with an intermediate position occupied by (e.g.) the use of a *je*-clause to express the cause of a feeling expressed by the main verb. In this last case, the *je*-clause is closer to being a completive clause than a circumstantial.

Indeed, if the mistresses (?) have come to the oasis, do not continue without sending (a message) for us through them, so that we do not worry. Also, if you wish to send anything to us by way of them, send! *e-u-nnê gar ša pi-ma*.

They are **really** coming to this place. (pKellis 20, v. 51)

The context is polemical in tone, for the writer wants to express the need for more communication on the part of the addressee(s). He urges them to write and send things while the means are at hand. He first takes this as a hypothesis ('if the *shone* come...'), but then states the fact that he knows that the latter condition is really going to be fulfilled. The use of *gar* both marks the utterance as justifying this request and signals that its content can be viewed as contrary to a previous implicature (that the condition might not be fulfilled). From a rhetorical point of view, the speaker thus forestalls a virtual objection on the addressee's part, so that responding to his request appears not to be negotiable. It is interesting to contrast this use with a causal *je*-clause in the same letter, which clearly appears as a pure expository explanation:

nto te Maria tnnau u-tou toue m-Mathaios je mnte-fholôs.

And you, Maria, send a pair of sandals to Mathaios, **for** he has none at all. (pKellis 20, v. 57–58)

Here, *je* introduces a clause that gives the reason why one should send a pair of sandals, with no polemical dimension. The addressee's viewpoint about the information is not taken into account.

Another letter contains both *gar* and causal *je* used in close contrast:

Now then, my beloved son, all the things I have entrusted (?) to you: Do not neglect them until I reach you.

ti-saune gar je k-na-hise je ntok pe n-uaet-k

I **really** know that you will labor, **in that** you are alone. (pKellis Copt 50, 7–8)

There is here a pragmatic presupposition that may be paraphrased as 'maybe you might think that I am not conscious that it will be hard for you to carry out everything you are supposed to do'. The writer uses *gar* to underscore the fact that, contrary to this assumed expectation on the part of the addressee, he is well aware of this difficulty. Then he uses *je* in an explicative *je*-clause that gives the cause of the preceding point at sentence level, with a descriptive point of view and no polemical dimension.

Do not neglect anything of (the) business until I come.

ti-na-ôsk gar en m-pk-bol p-nay a-tra-tnau n-rôma.

In fact I will not delay without you, (just enough) the time for me to send someone. (pKellis Copt 50, 20–21)

Here too the writer wants to prevent some implicit contestation on the addressee's part, the line of argument running as 'you might get tired of running the whole business without me, but *in fact* it won't last long, so don't be lazy'.

The next passage shows a particularly strong intersubjective dimension, for the writer takes a stand against a viewpoint which is ascribed not only to the addressee but also to other people:

Indeed, do not at all let them know that I am away from them.

e-ha-n-hise gar anak mn Hatre jn t-h-n-sntêne abol.

In fact we have labored, I and Hatre, since we parted from you. (pKellis Copt 50, 26–27)

With *gar*, the writer explicitly takes into account the fact that the information given may be counter-expectational. Other people ignore how hard he has been working during his absence. This is a point he wishes to make clear in a virtually polemical context.

The following letter shows two occurrences of *gar*, the first of which is much less argumentative and more textual in its use:

epidê ce are-shei je 'temai e-t-he e-tetn-o mma-s' anak gar a-p-sah ka-t n-Antinou, pa-san de a-f-fit-f a-f-tre-f-uah-f nsô-f.

e-i-meue je takha n-f-ei n-hêt n-f-ka-f n-u-ma e-f-šan-ka-f an te-na-mme

e-f-mie gar mma-f tonu e-f-tre-f-ôš kata ekklësia

ei men ešôpe e-f-iše mma-f nte-p-lilu mtan e-f-uêh nsô-f pf-eau pe.

Now, since you have written: 'Tell me about how you are', **in fact** as for me, the Teacher left me in Antinoou, but my brother he took to follow after him.

I am thinking perhaps he will come from the north (?) and leave him (Piene) some place. Should he again leave him, you will know.

The truth is he (the Teacher) loves him (Piene) very much, and has him read in church. Now, if he depends (?) on him, and the child is content following him, it will be his glory. (pKellis 25, 42–48)

Here *gar* goes first with a marked, left-extraposited topic ('me'). The speaker is responding to a request for information, and the presence of *gar* acknowledges that there may be some discrepancy between the expected information and the given answer. This does not imply a strong contrast between the two. The use of such a device need not always conform to a strictly logical interpretation, since it is also, from a textual point of view, a means of enhancing the 'dynamics' of discourse¹⁷. This use is interesting because in this case, translating *gar* with *for* ('for as for me') instead of *in fact* ('in fact as for me') sounds distinctly odd. No explanatory force is being conveyed; *gar* clearly links the clause to an expectation, thus functioning more at discourse level than at sentence level. The second *gar* of the passage also has a more textual than explanatory dimension. It is a way of resuming a topic after some parenthetic remarks (beginning with 'e-i-meue, I am thinking perhaps' until 'te-na-mme, you will know') while indicating that what is said is, if not straightforwardly contrary to expectation, then at least a fact that could not be taken for

17 In the same manner, the French *en fait* may be used as an argumentative connector expressing a contrast with an expectation, but also as a way of introducing a speaker's turn even in the absence of such a contrast.

granted before and, thus, not ‘expected’. The semantics of the particle thus seems to depart from that of the Greek original, at least in its classical use.

The next letter also has a peculiar feature, with four occurrences of *gar* at the very beginning:

*u-nac gar te t-lupé et-ah-šôpe nê-i mn[-t-êi]ppôš n-hêt et-ah-teha-i ntar-i-sôtm etbe
p-et-ah-šôpe je a-u-kim a-na-pi-seje
un cam gar m-p-nute a-tre-f-uôsf n-nu-meue
ne-i-uôše gar a-ei šara-k alla a-u-jo-s nê-i je p-hep en pe
takhu ce shei nê-i je a-k-r o ti-fi-rauš gar ha-pi-hôb tonu.*

In fact great was the grief that overcame me, and the heartbreak that seized me, when I heard about what happened; namely that they shook those of this word¹⁸.

In fact it is possible for God to thwart their designs. **In fact** I wanted to come to you, but I was told that it was not allowed. Therefore, write quickly to me how you are doing. **In fact** I am very concerned about this matter. (P. Kell. Copt. 37, 13–27)

The tone of this passage shows that the writer is clearly upset. Persecution against the community and anxiety about the addressee’s well-being are the main topic. The first *gar* comes in the first sentence of the letter after the greetings, which makes it clear that it functions more as a modal than as a connector¹⁹. The particle links the four consecutive utterances with an implicit presupposition: the writer is protesting his care for the addressee, out of fear that his absence might have been interpreted as a sign of indifference.

(greetings) Next: [I] inform you that our brother Petros came here. I [asked] after the children. He says: ‘They are well, as you yourselves will learn from their letters’.

a-i-jnu gar a[n e]-a-i-aš-u

In fact I questioned him (?) [again when] I had read them. ... (pKellis 40, 6)

In this example translating *for* would really make poor sense: ‘I [asked] after the children. He says: ‘They are well, as you yourselves will learn from their letters’ *for* I questioned (him) again after I had read them’. The particle thus functions more as a modal than as a connective device with a logical meaning. The utterance is in fact a pragmatic comment about the relevance of Petros’ answer. In this context, *gar* expresses an implicit argument: ‘he said so but he was wrong, and I still had to question him after having read the letters’. One can assume that the letters of the children were not very precise, as is often the case.

The last example shows a contrast between *gar* and *je*:

18 For the translation of this allusive passage, see Gardner, Alcock & Funk (1999: 233).

19 Our formulation implies that a language need not have a clear-cut formal category of modal particles as against connectives. More often than not, a discourse marker can have both uses. In its modal use, it also connects the utterance to another point, which is however only implicit. See Oréal (2011) and (2012).

If it is possible, and if there is something necessary to make me come up so that what is central be accomplished; (then) send it and I will come.

jn m-p-hou gar et-a-i pa-sôma o n-u-ai mp-i-te-t a-p-nkate je p-ma en pe.

In fact, since the day when I came, my body is restless; I have not given myself to sleep, for it is not the place! (pKellis 40, 11–12)

There is no clear explanatory power to the information given in the clause with *gar*. The context, though not decisive, is compatible with the modal force that is found in other occurrences, since it gives important information about the writer's state, which he may highlight as a revelation, something that the addressee might not have expected. The *je*-clause in the next sentence illustrates the fact that *je* functions at sentence level, with no pragmatic marking in relationship with the assumed point of view of the interlocutors. In contrast with *gar*, no heteroglossic dimension is in play.

Thus *gar* is used as a modally marked discourse marker²⁰. This does not mean that it has lost the connective force characteristic of the Greek original, but rather that it involves a sort of conventionalization of a context-bound reading of its basic meaning. Thus, the idiosyncratic use of *gar* in this Coptic sociolect appears to select one possible modal meaning of the Greek particle and systematize it in a way that is foreign to Greek. The particle acquires the status of a discourse marker with an essentially intersubjective role. One can now ask what relationship might exist between this use and the use of *gar* in literary Coptic. In translated literature, *gar* is used mainly as in Greek, and is pragmatically neutral. In original Coptic literature, it is very frequent, and it is not likely that one could account for its use according to any pragmatic explanation. But these facts do not rule out the possibility that in a given idiolect or sociolect, at least, the picture might be different. One can assume that in literary Coptic, *gar* was used as in Greek, with the whole range of possible submeanings, while in the Kellis letters, writers using *gar* in fact *selected* a marked option among the Greek range of possible semantics of the particle and thus coined a 'new' discourse marker that was used more as a modal than as a connective. Thus *gar* has a different status in the two types of text. Such a conclusion confirms, if this were still necessary, the relevance of register differences, as well as the need for detailed corpus-based studies.

2.3 Uses of *ep(e)idê* in the Kellis letters

In our corpus, the characteristic pragmatic force of *ep(e)idê* is to signal a marked presupposition concerning some shared or supposedly shared knowledge between the writer and the addressee. The intersubjective dimension is thus strong, the discourse marker often being used to indicate an implicitly polemical attitude. Such a presupposed common ground is absent from the neutral Coptic quasi-equivalents. Thus, the difference

20 I have chosen to translate *gar* with the English *really*, *in fact*, *the truth is*. Sometimes the more unmarked *for* seems compatible with the context, but even in these cases, the modally marked option fits the context better from an argumentative point of view. Moreover, the contrast with *je*, which introduces an explanatory clause at sentence level in a merely descriptive way, confirms the marked reading of *gar*.

between *ep(e)idê* and the Coptic *je* or *ebol je* appears similar to that between French *puisque* and *parce que*. The following passage shows a contrast between *epidê* and *je*:

Also, the other *agon* of oil that I received from Sabes [with the] *holokottinos*, I left it (with them),

epidê ša-n-ji-hah n-nêh ahun a-t-agapê je tn-aš auô se-u-ôm hah n-nêh.

since we take in much oil for the *agape*, in that we are many, and they consume much oil. (pKellis Copt 17, 22–25)

The writer wants to justify the use he has made of some oil. We may paraphrase the use of the Greek *epidê* as follows: ‘As you and I both know, we need much oil’. The addressee can only agree with this fact, and this is what the choice of *epidê* as against causal *je* expresses. In using it, the writer anticipates the agreement of the addressee on this point, while the following *je*-clause merely develops a preceding point in a descriptive way, without invoking any element open to debate.

Greet Takoshe and comfort her in my name, for I heard that her husband died. I was wanting to write to her,

alla epidê p-rôme spudaze mp-i-cn p-rête.

but **since** the man is busy I did not find the means. (pKellis Copt 20, 46–47)

Here the *epidê* clause is rather allusive, but precisely this shows that its content is already known to the addressee. The writer uses *epidê* in order to signal that he is aware that the clause contains information already known to the addressee, and that he is stating this content only to direct the latter’s attention to its meaning as a justification for his behavior.

The next passage shows explicitly that the fact expressed in the *epidê* clause is considered to be shared knowledge by the writer:

I am astonished how I entrusted you: ‘Do not neglect to send (a message) to me about your health’

epidê te-saune nn-barahe têr-u auô mpe-tnnau šine hôe ne-n a-p-têr-f

– **since** you know (the owners?) of all pack animals – and you did not send a greeting to us at all! (pKellis Copt 20, v^o 53–54)

The context here is also clearly polemical. The use of *epidê* has a precise argumentative motivation. The writer signals that the addressee cannot deny the fact that he had the means of sending a letter, and thus is fully responsible for his failure to do so.

In the following example, the writer is having a conflict with the addressee concerning his relationship and behavior with a group of people:

Are (not) you yourself a catechumen?

epidê e-n-ti-šbiô n-laue en m-pi-ma n-net-u-ire mma-u ne-n.

For we are not retaliating against anyone in this place for what they are doing to us. (pKellis Copt 22, 61–62)

He is trying to make a point that will prove to the addressee that he is wrong. In such a polemical context, the presence of *epidê* correlates again with the writer's need to strengthen his own rhetorical position by appealing to a fact presented as indisputable.

epidê ce are-shei je 'tema-i e-t-he e-tetn-o mma-s' anak gar a-p-sah-ka-t n-Antinou, pa-san de a-f-fit-f a-f-tre-f-uah-f nsô-f.

Now, **since** you have written: 'Tell me about how you are', in fact as for myself, the Teacher left me in Antinoou, but my brother, he took to follow after him. (pKellis Copt 25, 41–43)

Here it is clear from the situation that the addressee is already aware of the informational content conveyed by the *epidê* clause, for it reminds him of his own letter asking for news about the current writer. Notice that the same use of *epidê* is also attested in monolingual Greek letters. The loan thus has a formulary dimension that includes the pragmatic force already present in the Greek original. Still, it is interesting to contrast this occurrence with the use of the Coptic *etbe je* in the same letter²¹:

I have been unable to find a way to go ..., nor to visit my father,
etbe je ce-r-ôktiru hn t-polis etbe t-psukhê an m-makaria n-ta-mo nac.

because they are mourning in the city for the blessed soul of my great mother. (pKellis Copt 25, 51–52)

With *etbe je*, there is no presupposition concerning the status of the information in the addressee's mind. It functions as a conjunction at the sentence level: the writer wants to explain his behavior by means of information presumably unknown to the addressee.

The following passage shows that the previous knowledge that the addressee may have from what is said does not automatically entail the use of *epidê*:

Therefore, [I] beg you, [my] blessed [daughters], that you will [send] me two *choes* of oil.

For you know yourselves that we are [in need] here;

epidê tn-lajh.

since we are afflicted²², ([send] the portion of oil). (pKellis Copt 31, 33)

While stating explicitly that the addressee already knows the information ('For you know yourselves ...'), the writer uses *je* to motivate his request in a non-polemical way. At this point, he does not enlist the intersubjective dimension of shared knowledge in order to enhance his argumentative position. But then he does so, repeating his request, now with *epidê*. In this context, he is likely to insist on his reason for doing so, a reason which is even better if presented as undebatable. The *epidê*-clause is again very allusive, which is normal since the information is presented as already known by the addressee. Thus the

21 This is the only occurrence of *etbe je* in this corpus. It may be relevant to note that the writer is a theology student with a rather sophisticated style of writing, thus showing a greater capacity for variation.

22 I adopt here a slightly different segmentation of discourse from that given by the editors.

writer signals that he does not intend to *inform* them about it, but to *recall its relevance* to his request.

The last example in this corpus is interesting because it occurs not in a letter with a marked polemical tone, but in an account of commodities, a text type which is *a priori* rather neutral:

I am allotted (?) 2 *maje* of wheat ..., to full it (and) to moisten it, in that you ...;
epidê hn-sart ne e-u-hau nei en ne-ti-êp [...]
since these are poor wools. These are not the ones I am allotted (?) ... (pKellis Copt
 48, 5–6)

The choice of *epidê* here (vs. *je*) allows the writer to enhance the argumentative force of the clause. In using it, he underscores the relevance of what is said while presenting the content of the clause as a fact that cannot be denied. Implicitly, he thereby forestalls a possible contest. Even in such a text, there is again a rhetorical strategy at play, involving a strong intersubjective dimension. A possible paraphrase of *epidê* is: ‘as you know and shall not contest...’.

The lack of a fine-grained study of the use of particles and conjunctions in *koine* Greek makes it difficult to really compare the Coptic use as we find it in the Kellis letters with the original value of the form in the donor language²³. Still, one can say that in Greek too, *epeidê* often implies that the informational content of the clause is presented as shared, uncontroversial knowledge on the speaker’s part. The temporal meaning of *epeidê*, originally more frequent than the causal one, might have disappeared at some time in Greek²⁴. In any case, the use of *ep(e)idê* in our corpus clearly selects the more marked option from a pragmatic point of view. This intersubjective reading is already available in the donor language, but it gets systematized in this idiolect as an argumentative device playing a special role in the negotiation of viewpoints by interlocutors.

In the literary register too, causal *epeidê* is well-attested. Non-literary sources seem to show that *epeidê* was well established in Coptic, while *epei* is not²⁵. It is of interest to note that the literary use is not the same as the use in Biblical translations. In Greek Biblical texts, *epei* is more frequent than *epeidê*²⁶. In the Sahidic NT, *epei* is treated in various ways, among which the more frequent are the following²⁷:

23 The particle *dê* that is added to *epei* indeed has a pragmatic ‘confirmative’ dimension (like the *epeidê*-clause), expressing ‘consensual information’.

24 Out of 10 instances of *epeidê* in the NT, only one is temporal. As a puristic loan in Modern Greek, *epeidê* means *because*.

25 The dictionary of Förster (2002) shows many occurrences of *epeidê* in documentary Coptic, while there are only 3 *epei/epi* in the same corpus.

26 In the NT, there are 10 *epeidê* for 26 *epei*; in the Septuaginta, 20 *epeidê* for 39 *epei*.

27 See Kasser (1966: 253).

- the translation keeps the Greek *epei* (11%)
- the translation replaces *epei* by *epeidê* (11%)
- the translation gives a Coptic equivalent (36% *ebol je*; 7% *etbe je*, 25% *mmon*).

The relatively frequent choice of a different Greek form (11% *epeidê*) as an equivalent to *epei* may indicate that *epeidê* was more familiar to the translator²⁸. But why not borrow *epei* in non-literary Coptic? I would suggest that a preference for the pragmatically more marked form might have played a role in this choice. An interesting consequence of this would be that the frequency in Greek of a conjunction is not a decisive factor in borrowing. This point can be illustrated in the semantic field of explanation/causality. Greek words as frequent as *dio* or *dioti*, *because*, *therefore*, were not borrowed, even though *dio* is very frequent in the Greek papyri²⁹. Moreover, both *dioti* and *dio* are frequent in Greek Biblical texts³⁰. Why not borrow *dio*? A possible answer might well be that *dio* had none of the pragmatic force which characterizes *epeidê*, and which it had in Coptic as well.

A nice case of Greek-for-Greek replacement in translation is of interest here:

epeidê a-k-sôtém nsa-t-smê n-tek-shimi a-k-ôm ebol hen-pi-ššên et-a-i-henhôn-k ero-f je...

Since you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ... (*Genesis*, 3, 17, pBodmer III)³¹

The Greek has *hoti*, which is neutral from a pragmatic point of view. In two other occurrences in the same text, *hoti* is translated by *je*. A *je*-clause could have been used here as well³². But the choice of *epeidê* suits the context perfectly, because of the intersubjective presupposition that is characteristic of *epeidê* vs. *hoti*. The speaker (God) presupposes the acknowledgment of the content of the clause by the addressee (Adam). One may paraphrase: ‘You’ve done that, you’re not going to deny it’. The use of the Greek word *epeidê* here is thus semantically true to its subtle argumentative use in the donor language. As a marked option (vs. the loan of the Greek original *hoti* or the usual Coptic equivalent *je*), it is also a way of laying more emphasis on an event of profound significance for humankind. Thus a parameter in borrowing – and even more in code-switching discourse markers – might indeed inhere in the speaker/writer’s interest in having pragmatically marked forms to serve in discourse argumentative strategies, while neutral forms are more frequently replaced by native equivalents.

28 As for *epeidê* in the NT (10 occurrences), it is always borrowed in the Sahidic version except for one occurrence (where a mixed Greek-Coptic equivalent is used: *ebol gar je*). This is the only case where the clause does not come first in the sentence or paragraph, but at the end in a concluding position.

29 For the Ptolemaic period, cf. Mayser (1906–1934: 134).

30 The Septuaginta has 341 occurrences of *dioti*; the New Testament has 25 *dioti*, translated by Coptic *je* (20 occ.), *ebol je* (2 occ.), *etbepai* (1 occ.), or left untranslated. All 52 occurrences of *dio* in the New Testament are translated by *etbepai* in Sahidic.

31 Other versions in Sahidic show Coptic forms like *ebol je*, thus confirming that no lack of ‘indigenous’ option can motivate borrowing in such a case.

32 See Layton (2004: 493) for a *je*-clause preceding the main clause.

2.4 Other Greek particles in the Kellis letters and their pragmatic motivation

A brief look at the overall repertoire of Coptic vs. Greek discourse markers in the Kellis corpus is enough to show that no gap-filling explanation can account for the use of Greek particles in these letters. Without going into detail, what can we say about a possible generalization of the pragmatic approach in explaining the use of other Greek particles and conjunctions? As for those that have a concessive or adversative basic meaning, it is quite clear that some pragmatic force is present, for these forms by definition are used to express some kind of opposition in the more or less implicit polyphony of discourse. Of course one might object that this is not true of the most frequent such particle, the Greek *alla* ('but'), which is well-attested everywhere in Coptic. Thus, a need for major expressivity as the motivation for the use of *alla* cannot be demonstrated: *alla* is pragmatically neutral³³. Still, it is important to notice that its equivalent in some embedded languages in modern contact situation is frequently switched or borrowed: e.g. *but* is frequent in Canadian French-English bilingual communities. This fact is contrary to any 'fill-the-gap' explanation. It may hint at a more general pragmatic motivation, even if the frequency of the borrowed item may make it impossible to detect at a posterior stage³⁴.

The pragmatic motivation for switched/borrowed discourse markers might also suggest an explanation for the lesser frequency of other Greek conjunctions like those marking purpose or consequence. For these are *statistically* more descriptive, and their potential use in polemics is less crucial to their meaning than in the case of causal/explicative or concessive/adversative markers³⁵. It could also help explain why *kai* was practically not borrowed (except for some uses in standardized translations, a phenomenon that remains bound to translation technique).

3 Borrowing of Greek particles and the Greek-Coptic bilingual setting

This study aims mainly at assessing what we can learn from the borrowing of certain Greek particles as a specific and isolated phenomenon in a homogeneous corpus. Our observations regarding a possible pragmatic motivation may in fact have no relevance for other parts of speech³⁶. At least our study may be credited with clarifying what this specific phenomenon really brings to the debate about bilingualism and interference in Egypt. It can also help in raising the following questions and making some suggestions as to the nature of the Greek-Coptic contact and its various outcomes.

33 On a general level, *alla* is in fact the unmarked Coptic way to express adversative coordination, as Matthias Müller has kindly confirmed to me.

34 Other Greek particles do not play a major role in argumentation, but have a more textual function, even if such a categorization is often less straightforward and subject to overlapping. In this use, discourse markers have no or little polyphonic/intersubjective force. But their textual role in marking cohesion still makes them function at discourse level, and not at sentence level.

35 Of course we are talking here about use in texts independent of choice of translational technique. Even in the latter register, a writer might use in some contexts the Greek *hōste* or *hina* with some pragmatic force. But discourse properties make it likely that this will not happen often.

36 But note that philologists sometimes make use of a pragmatic explanation, cf. Kasser (1966: 51).

3.1 Literary Coptic and the donor language

An extensive study of a literary corpus would be necessary to assess differences between what is found in a corpus like the Kellis letters and in literary texts. In original literature (letters, sermons...), we find basically the same stock of Greek particles as in the Kellis letters, plus some other forms, much rarer. For example, Besa uses *kai mên*, a rare combination that does not seem to belong to colloquial register, but rather to the classical language. Since it does not even occur in the New Testament, it seems plausible that its use in Coptic results from contact between literary Greek and literary Coptic more than between spoken varieties of these languages. This heterogeneity in the use of Greek particles raises the question of what donor language one should be considering, *i.e.* literary Greek or spoken *koine*. The question is all the more important regarding particles, since, unlike nouns or verbs, their use may be very different in written and spoken registers. Unfortunately, there is a lack of studies on the use of particles in *koine* Greek³⁷. Nevertheless, it is relevant to note that, a bit counterintuitively, Greek particles seem to belong more to written language than to oral discourse. As a very detailed statistical study by Duhoux shows, the less a text can be supposed to imitate oral discourse³⁸, the (relatively) more frequent are particles in it. Studying Greek particles in Coptic thus leads us to ask whether *biliteracy* rather than bilingualism might not be the notion more relevant to Greek-Coptic contact. One might compare it to the Sino-Vietnamese case, where the data suggest that many Sino-Vietnamese words, including adverbs and sentence connecting devices, were ‘not borrowed by bilingual speakers through spoken contact but rather by biliterate Vietnamese who were bringing written language into formal Vietnamese’³⁹. In the same perspective, the use of a Greek particle like coordinative *de* rather than the *kai* present in New Testament Greek might result from a sort of biliteracy, and as such could even represent a case of ‘Atticistic use’, as against a *koine* use⁴⁰. But contrary to Lefort’s view, this phenomenon does not imply the kind of deep influence of Greek on Egyptian syntax that would result in Coptic existing only as a mixed language⁴¹.

3.2 Are Greek particles in Coptic (always) loanwords or switches?

From what has been said above about the use of Greek particles in various Coptic registers, it is quite clear that a different treatment is needed for each particular case. One may compare the Coptic facts to Syriac, where some forms sounding like *gar* and *de* preserved the syntax of their Greek equivalents and were so deeply integrated as to appear in texts written by monolinguals⁴², while other Greek particles found in translations from the 7th and 8th centuries CE resulted from a change in translation technique to a word-for-word method. Perhaps the most reasonable approach would be to posit a *continuum* between

37 Cf. Horsley (1994: 62).

38 Cf. Duhoux 1997.

39 Cf. Alves 2009.

40 Cf. Lefort 1947 for supposed Atticisms in the syntax of Coptic.

41 Cf. the arguments against Lefort’s view in Polotsky 1950.

42 Cf. Taylor (2002: 326).

switched and borrowed items⁴³. Shisha-Halevy thus writes of Greek loan-modifiers as representing ‘a gradient phenomenon of assimilation’: ‘the assimilation scale can be established in terms of productivity, of integration in the Coptic semasiological system, and (sometimes) in terms of phonological structure and properties.’⁴⁴

The parameter of frequency is surely relevant here. In a variety of French spoken on Prince Edward Island, English *but* and *so* may plausibly merit the status of borrowing (vs. codeswitch) on a frequency basis, while other items like *anyway*, *because*, *I mean*, *well* are considered codeswitches. The same study also shows that very close groups sharing some borrowings may each have their own distinctive behavior concerning one item, with no apparent motivation. For example, English *then* is not used with the same frequency in two different communities on Prince Edward Island⁴⁵. Duration is another relevant parameter in assessing the status of switched vs. borrowed items⁴⁶. More fine-grained diachronic studies involving other Coptic corpora are needed here⁴⁷. With its limited scope, the present study of the Kellis letters shows that in one particular sociolect, Greek particles like causal *gar* and *epeidē* may have a definite recurrent role at discourse/textual level that makes their opposition to seeming Coptic equivalents meaningful from a structural point of view. The extension of such a use to a larger social community remains an open question⁴⁸. This use might also be termed more idiolectal than dialectal⁴⁹.

3.3 Greek discourse markers in Coptic as cultural borrowing

Some case studies of modern contact have shown that the borrowing of discourse markers does not imply a high degree of bilingualism, but rather an intensity of use of *both* languages⁵⁰. In fact the donor language need not be widely spoken in a community to al-

43 Cf. Poplack (1988: 239) about the the distinction between ‘lexical borrowing on the community level’ and ‘momentary or nonce borrowing by individuals’.

44 Shisha-Halevy (1986: § 1.13.11).

45 Cf. King (2000: 109–113).

46 For example, *oc* for *and* or *but* occurs in northern Middle English texts as a borrowing from Norse. As against other loanwords, it remained restricted to the North and never spread into other dialects, cf. Kroch, Taylor, Ringe (2000: 357–358).

47 Kahle (1954: 265) posits a change in time, reflected by a translated corpus: ‘As Sahidic was already essentially developed, the Christian influence on the dialect was comparatively small and gradual. We may point to the strong influx of Greek words and in particular Greek particles, though many of the earliest texts still have native for Greek words and show a reluctance to use Greek particles’.

48 It is relevant here to mention the monolectal approach advocated by Meeuwis & Blommaert (1998: esp. 81f). From a sociolinguistic point of view, one might well think of the Kellis community as a group where ‘code-switching is the rule’, using what they call a ‘code-switched variety’. As they put it, “code-switched varieties are often used in a ‘relaxed’ way, and for purposes that have more to do with speech elaboration, a desire to speak nicely or artistically, to create humorous effects, and so on”. In such cases, no functional explanation of code-switching is required, while the pragmatic motivation is more relevant.

49 So Diebner & Kasser (1989: 57, n. 40).

50 Cf. Mougeon & Beniak 1991 on *so* in a variety of French Canadian.

low for so-called core-borrowing. ‘Sheer magnetism of the dominant culture’ is enough⁵¹. Here it might be relevant to recall a characteristic of devices like Greek particles that often goes unrecognized. This is their partial ‘redundancy’. For their role is to make explicit a relationship between clauses, sentences or speech acts that most often can remain implicit without hindering understanding. Moreover, in oral production, whether formal or not, suprasegmental features are even more precise, from a semantic point of view, than particles in playing the same role. Thus, the emergence of a *new written register* within a historical context when Greek forms and conventions dominated in Egypt may explain this kind of borrowing. No functional gap strictly speaking was ‘mechanically’ filled, but perhaps a stylistic gap was. In that sense, one could even ask whether Greek particles are really a case of cultural borrowing rather than of core-borrowing⁵².

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51 Myers-Scotton (2006: 216–217).

52 In the same line of thought, the widespread idea that Ancient Egyptian would be more paratactic than Ancient Greek means little from a functional point of view, since from the oldest known phase of the language on, it had a full system of particles, connectors, and subordinators that could be used when needed. However, Egyptian texts from the pharaonic period are not written according to the same literary style and conventions as, e.g., classical Greek prose. See Oréal (2004).

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