



Focus on an old topic

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The morpheme *jn* is well-known for its polyfunctionality Earlier Egyptian. Its main contexts of use as a free morpheme having scope over a nominal syntagm are the following:

– preposition introducing the nominal referent with the semantic role of agent (or agent-like)² in constructions with a marked information structure where the agent bears a contrastive focus:

jn + agent + *sdm-f* form with modal semantics

jn + agent + participle (imperfective or perfective)

– preposition introducing the nominal referent with the semantic role of agent in passive constructions or constructions involving a non-finite form.

Moreover, *jn* is used as a marker with sentential scope in interrogative utterances.³ A limited use of the particle as a marker of protasis may also be linked to the latter use, in line with a cross-linguistically well attested pattern.

Various earlier studies have aimed at formulating a unifying analysis of this intriguing polyfunctionality. Already in 1988, Antonio Loprieno showed the intricacies of the interplay between syntax, information structure and pragmatics that characterize *jn* in its use as an agentive marker within constructions with a marked word order ‘Agent + Predicate’. He also proposed ways of relating other uses of the particle. With a different approach, Chris Reintges’s (1998) account is based on the assumption that focus marking is the core function of *jn* in all its uses, in deep syntax if not strictly at the level of information structure. This analysis has a lot of robust arguments, but the author is forced to concede that all contexts where *jn* functions as an agentive particle ultimately derive from a focalizing construction, a step that appears historically debatable. This difficulty is seen and avoided by Tom Güldemann, who in 2014 aimed at exploring the hypothesis of a relationship between the particle *jn* and the quotative verb *j* along a postulated path of verbification.⁴ Besides this specific point, Güldemann’s approach differs from Reintges 1998 mainly in the proposed origin for *jn*. However, this proposal remains somewhat vague and linguistically undefined: a ‘presentational/identificational marker’ appears to put together semantic domains that are not the same, as does the gloss ‘it/this/there is’, mixing the reconstruction as a kind of deictic copula (indeed, a typological likely source for a focus marker, if this was the function of *jn*), and as an existential copula, which does not fit with the attested role of *jn*. This is probably due to Güldemann’s awareness of the place of *jn* within the utterance, which does not favour a deictic origin. Both *js* and *pw*, an earlier and a more recent deictic elements in Earlier

¹ Aoroc, CNRS-PSL, Paris. I would like to thank the reviewers for their careful reading that allowed me to improve substantially the presentation of my arguments.

² ‘Agent-like’ refers to a participant formally encoded in the same way as a prototypical agent, not to a semantic category of ‘less-than-prototypical’ agent.

³ Its supposed marginal use as an emphatic assertive particle remains highly dubious, see below.

⁴ See Schenkel 2017 for a detailed evaluation of this hypothesis.

Egyptian, never occur in first position. The lack of clarity in this definition as presentative and/or identifying marker also reveals a weak point in the analysis. Within this approach, there remains a difficulty in explaining why such a marker would have its distribution restricted to introducing a referent with an agent or agent-like semantic role. However, this fact is crucial for the understanding of what is marked by *jn* itself in the various constructions where it occurs.⁵ Moreover, the account of interrogative *jn* based on such a source appears even less satisfactory than Reintges's, for a presentational particle is not a likely candidate as a source for an interrogative marker. As an identificational copula, *jn* would seem less difficult to connect to interrogation, but other problems arise when one takes into account that *jn* is originally used not in neutral, but in non-canonical questions, as will be seen below.⁶

All approaches acknowledge the relevance of information structure for the understanding of the role played by *jn* in the utterance. However, in the wake of Loprieno's synchronic account, I want to suggest a way out of the confusion between a thematic function (indicating the subject whom the predicate is about) and a use in focalizing context, features that are mixed together in Güldemann's 'presentative/identificational' functions. The reconstructed path of change thus proposes another common source explaining the emergence of other uses of *jn*. According to this historical scenario, *jn* came to acquire its function as a prototypical marker for the semantic role of agent in a source construction where it was used to introduce a topicalized agent. Focalizing semantics obtain only in some of the constructions in which *jn* is used without characterizing *jn* itself. The presence of *jn* as a formative in the paradigm of independent pronouns such as 1S *jnk*, 2MS *jntk* indeed hints at a primary function as a topic marker rather than a focus marker. The proposed explanation also has some bearing on the comparison with Akkadian cognate pronominal forms. A fresh diachronic view at these data thus suggests a closer functional similarity with Egyptian *jn*. The analysis will proceed as follows:

- 1 Traces of *jn* with a left-extraposed topic
- 2 From topic marker to agentive preposition in focalizing constructions
- 3 Postverbal agent in antitopic function
- 4 Clausal *jn*: topics, conditionals and interrogatives
- 5 Emphatic affirmative *jn*: a ghost use
- 6 Independent pronouns in Akkadian and in Egyptian
- 7 The etymology of *jn*
- 8 Summary

1 Traces of *jn* with a left-extraposed topic

⁵ Loprieno 1988.

⁶ As a focus marker with a deictic origin rather than a verbal expression (as reconstructed in Reintges 1998), the place of *in* at the beginning of the proposition seems problematic. Moreover, it would [in what circumstances ? please clarify] have the same function as the focus marker *js*, whose deictic origin is much more in line with its syntax and older uses. See Oréal 2011.

The notion of topic used in this contribution is both formal and functional: it refers to everything that is detached by left extraposition in the utterance, and, pragmatically, ‘the matter of current interest which a statement is about and with respect to which a proposition is to be interpreted as relevant’.⁷ Within this approach of aboutness topics, a contrastive topic is a topic which, according to the speaker’s view, is presented as selected against other possible topics.

Not enough attention has been paid to traces of *jn* + Full Noun used as a left-extraposed topic, although these examples are known and mentioned in the literature.⁸ This use is rare and may be considered as recessive already in the *Pyramid Texts*:

(1)

<i>jn</i>	<i>nwt</i>	<i>ms-n-s</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>hn^c</i>	<i>wsjr</i>
TOP	Nut	give_birth-ANT-3FS	M	with	Osiris

‘As for Nut, she gave birth to M with Osiris’ (PT § 1428M)

Here the nominal phrase introduced by *jn* has the discourse function of a marked contrastive topic and is resumed in the main clause by a coreferential suffix pronoun. In a variant, the participial statement is used instead:

(2)

<i>jn</i>	<i>nwt</i>	<i>ms-t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>hn^c</i>	<i>wsjr</i>
TOP	Nut	give_birth\PCPL.FV-3FS	M	with	Osiris

‘As for Nut, she gave birth to M with Osiris’ (PT § 1428P)

Does this imply that, both variants having exactly the same meaning, the participial statement and the construction ‘*jn SN sdm-n-f*’ need to share the same structure, the latter being only the older of the two?⁹ Another possibility is that the two constructions have a very similar, although not identical meaning. An argument in favour of this view lies in the fact that, with the negation, the absence of term focus on the agent marked by *jn* is sometimes made apparent by the choice of the negative pattern. Thus, in the following example, the dislocated agent remains in the same position while the negation *ni* shows up in the main clause:

(3)

<i>jn</i>	<i>hr</i>	<i>z3-k</i>	<i>ms-n-k</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>rd-f</i>	<i>ppy</i>	<i>pn</i>
TOP	Horus	son-2MS	beget-ANT-2MS	NEG	place\MOD-3MS	Pepi	DEM

⁷ Lambrecht (1994: 119).

⁸ Allen (1984: § 408), while convincingly showing that the constructions with a suffix pronoun coreferential to the topicalized Agent in the main clause are older than the focalizing constructions with participles, considers the *sdm-n-f* form as a nominal one in a cleft sentence, a syntactic analysis that makes less sense in view of other examples like (7) and (8). He mentions three examples in the *Pyramid Texts*: §644c, §1428e, §1566c.

⁹ Loprieno (1995: 253) sees this example as a preterital cleft sentence in early form. Kruchten (1996: 58) adopts this diachronic explanation of the difference between the royal dedication formula (‘name of king and *sdm-n-f*’) and the private one (*jn* A and perfective participle). I would rather suggest that in the royal formula, the name of the king is marked as a salient new topic by anteposition alone before the Anterior *sdm-n-f* form, while in the private one, exclusive identification of the dedicant really is at stake – hence the use of the participial statement, with or without *jn*.

tp mwt
PREP dead

‘As to Horus, your son whom you have begotten, he shall not place this Pepi at the head of the dead’¹⁰

This pattern differs from what is expected with a focalizing construction, for with a focalized agent, the following construction appears in order, showing the discontinuous negation *n...js*:

(4)

<i>n</i>	<i>jn</i>	<i>js</i>	<i>ppy</i>	<i>dbḥ</i>	<i>m3-f</i>	<i>tw</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>qd-k</i>	<i>pw</i>
NEG	TOP	FOC	Pepy	ask\PCPL.PFV	see\SUBJ-3MS	2MS	PREP	form-2MS	DEM
<i>wsjr</i>	<i>dbḥ</i>		<i>m3-f</i>		<i>tw</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>qd-k</i>	<i>pw</i>	
Osiris	ask\PCPL.PFV	see\SUBJ-3MS		2MS	PREP	form-2MS	DEM		

‘It is not Pepy who asked that he may see you in this your form (...), it is Osiris who asked that he may see you in this your form’¹¹

In the second part of the passage, one notices that the agent, Osiris, is not preceded by the agentive marker *jn*. Its presence does not seem to be mandatory, a fact that points to its role as having no bearing on focalization itself, but rather at a semantic level (making the semantic role of the participant expressed before the verb explicit), as we shall see below.¹²

In one case, the pronoun *jntsn* of the *jn*- series that integrated the morphem *jn*- at a protohistorical state of the language has the function of a second topic. It is coreferential with the first one, with identificational semantics, as is the case in the usual participial statement focalizing the agent, but with the semantic role of beneficiary marked by the function of the resumptive pronoun in the main clause:

(5)

<i>ntrw</i>	<i>nbw</i>	(...)	<i>jntsn</i>	<i>stpp</i>	<i>n-sn</i>	<i>stpwt-sn</i>
gods	all		3PL	cut\PASS.PAST	to-3PL	cut-3PL

‘All gods (...), (as for) them, one will cut their cuts for them’¹³

An even more interesting structure appears in the following example where the noun introduced by *jn* is undoubtedly extraposed and resumed in the main clause by the pronoun *swt*:

¹⁰ *Pyramid Texts* § 969a.

¹¹ *Pyramid Texts* 1128a-bP.

¹² Doret 1991 and Kruchten 1996 explain the omission of *jn* in terms of enunciative involvement of the first-person speaker. However, such an explanation does not fit well with examples from the *Pyramid Texts* where the name of a god is the prominent Agent introduced without *jn* (see the variant § 1428eN). It seems more simple to relate this omission to the varying degree of topicality of the participant, a discursive parameter that leaves some freedom of choice to the speaker, but explains why *jn* is mainly omitted before the name of the deceased in examples from the *Coffin Texts*.

¹³ *Pyramid Texts* § 1651cN.

(6)

<i>jn</i>	<i>jw^c-j</i>	<i>pw...</i>	<i>swt</i>	<i>rdi</i>	<i>n-j</i>	<i>s(y)</i>
TOP	heir-1s	DEM	3MS	give\PCPL.PFV	to-1s	it

‘As to this my heir, ...*he* has given it to me’¹⁴

According to Güldemann, this example shows the original, ‘more basic identificational function’ of *jn*.¹⁵ This is in fact not the case, since the following participial statement is the basic expected pattern where an identifying focus on the agent is expressed. The nominal phrase introduced by *jn* is extraposed and encoding again a contrastive topic.

To sum up, these examples show a recessive use of *jn* in sentences where the extraposed topicalized participant is indexed by a subject suffix pronoun in the following part of the utterance.

Moreover, I propose to analyze the source of the well-attested ‘*jn* + Agent + *s_{dm}-f*’-construction as a subtype of the same category ‘extraposed topic, main clause’. Since this construction is usually considered as a construction focalizing the agent, which may indeed be its role in synchrony, I shall now turn to the role of *jn* in sentences with a marked information structure where the agent is under focus.

2 From topic marker to agentive preposition in a focalizing construction

There are many arguments in favour of analyzing the polyfunctionality of the particle *jn* as deriving from a basic function as a focus marker.¹⁶ The main one is of course its presence in the participial statement, a construction that has clear focalizing semantics. Güldemann 2014 prefers to highlight features of *jn* that make it akin to a presentational or identificational marker. From a semantic point of view, identification is precisely the basic operation underlying focalization.¹⁷ Accordingly, Güldemann’s presentation of how *jn* is used before a nominal is in fact not very different from that of Reintges, since it replaces the notion of focus by identification. Unfortunately, it misses the crucial point of the difference between the participial statement and the aforementioned construction ‘*jn* + Agent + prospective *s_{dm}-f* form’.¹⁸ In the latter, the subject suffix pronoun is coreferential with the initial agent. The semantics often show a meaning closer to a marked contrastive topic than a marked focus on the initial agent, resulting in possible glosses as ‘As to N, he has to listen, it is up to him to listen’. In Spell 609 of the *Pyramid Texts* for example, two parallel utterances present supernatural beings who are to play a role in the king’s afterlife. In both cases, the main predicate of the sentence is a modal *s_{dm}-w-f*:

(7)

¹⁴ Gardiner (1957: 176).

¹⁵ Güldemann (2015: 235-236).

¹⁶ Reintges 1998, followed by Jansen-Winkel (2002: 19), although the latter remains uncommitted as regards the proposed source as a vestigial verbal copula.

¹⁷ Robert 1993.

¹⁸ Vernus (1990: 55-60).

snt=k spdt mstw=k ntr-dw³(wj) ḥmsi-w=k jmwt(j)=sn(j) ḥr st-wrt jr.t gs psd.t(j)
 (...)

jn h<p>nntj ndri-w=f^c=k j:h³=k m wj³ r^c

Your sister is Sothis, your descendant is the Morning Dog, you shall sit between them on the great throne that is on the Two Ennead's side.

(...)

As to Hpnn.tj, he shall take your hand as you descend in the bark of Re

(PT § 1707a-§ 1709a)

In § 1707a, the participants introduced in the preceding clause are resumed with a circumstantial function, while in § 1709a, the supernatural being is the subject of the modal *ndri-w=f*. Both share the same discursive status of a topic, not a focus. Accordingly, the informational content of the verbal forms *ḥmsi-w=k* and *ndri-w=f* is not presupposed as is the case with the participle in the participial statement, but belongs to the comment (or rheme) part of the utterance.

Now if one accepts the proposal that *jn* once had the original function of introducing an extraposed topic to the left of the utterance, it is still necessary to explain its widely attested use in Earlier Egyptian focalizing constructions. In other texts from the corpus of the Pyramid Texts, such as the so-called Cannibal Hymn, the participial statement and the prospective construction with an agent introduced by *jn* may indeed appear to share the same semantic reading as focalizing constructions. A diachronic path from the primary function of *jn* to its latter use may be reconstructed as follows:

Step 1

In the first step of the reconstructible process, *jn* is used as a topic marker with an extraposed agent that is resumed in main clause by a coreferential pronoun. In Earlier Egyptian, this appears to be the case in constructions with a modal *sdm-f* where initial *jn* + Full Noun Agent, or an independent pronoun, originally encode a contrastive topic, as is the case in the following Old Egyptian example:

(8)

<i>jn</i>	<i>ḥzh</i>	<i>r-nfr</i>	<i>jri-f</i>	<i>sw</i>
TOP	harvest\PCPL	well	do\MOD-3MS	3MS

‘The one who harvest well, he shall do it’¹⁹

Step 2

Semantically, the contrastive emphasis bearing on the topic introduced by *jn* may have been reanalyzed as a pragmatic focus with maybe only a slight change in prosodic features marking the integration of the no longer dislocated agent. From there, the particle *jn* may undergo a reanalysis as marking the initial agent as such.

Step 3

¹⁹ Simpson (1976: fig. 5-10, pl. 9-16).

The group *jn* + agent may now extend to nominal, participial constructions where the initial agent is also under focus, without this focus being marked by *jn* itself, but rather by the identificational semantics and word order:

(9)

<i>jn</i>	<i>zʒ</i>	<i>snt-f</i>	<i>jmj-rʒ-hmw-kʒ</i>	<i>sn-mrr</i>	<i>j.jri</i>
AG	son	sister-3MS	overseer of the ka-priests	Sen-merer	do\PTCP.PFV
<i>n-f</i>		<i>nw</i>			
to-3MS		this			

‘It is the son of his sister, overseer of the ka-priests Sen-merer who did this for him’²⁰

There are other formal features than *jn* that may play a role in characterizing this construction as marked at the level of information structure:

- marked word order: A/S semantic role first
- possibly intonation contour
- nominal predication with identificational semantics, contrastive focus being one possible reading of identification.

Note that other independent pronouns than the *jn*- series may be used in all the focalizing constructions, which is also an argument in favour of *jn* not marking focus in itself. The recessive independent pronouns characterized by a *-t* ending thus are also attested in initial position:

(10)

<i>swt</i>	<i>jyi</i>		<i>r</i>	<i>wnjs</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>šmi</i>	<i>wnjs</i>	<i>r-f</i>
3MS	come\PCPL.PERF		PREP	Wenis	NEG	go\PCPL.PERF	Wenis	PREP -3MS

‘It is him who came against Wenis, Wenis did not go against him’²¹

Moreover, even with a Full Noun agent, the particle *jn* may be omitted in some cases, as seen above. Thus, focus in the participial statement appears to be encoded by the whole construction, word order and possibly intonational contour, but not by the presence of *jn* in itself.

An alternative scenario would involve the reanalysis of a nominal predication with extraposed topic as a sentence with a syntactic order ‘subject + predicate’, but with an information structure ‘focus + presupposition’:

(11)

‘ <i>jn</i> + Agent, <i>jri st</i> + zero copula’	>	‘ <i>jn</i> Agent <i>jri st</i> ’
As for A, (he is) who made it		‘It is A who made it’

²⁰ Hassan (1941: 117, fig. 104, pl. 25-27).

²¹ *Pyramid Texts* § 232aW.

In the latter case, the common semantic feature of contrastive emphasis with the ‘*jn* A *sḏm-f*’ construction would play no role in the use of *jn* in the participial statement

Whatever it may be, both historical scenarios pave the way to a potential reanalysis of a preposition used to introduce an extraposed participant with agent role as a marker of agentivity itself. I shall now turn to other contexts where the agentive preposition resulting from the grammaticalization of a marker introducing the initial agent is extended to a non-initial syntactic position.

3 Postverbal agent in antitopic function

In two main contexts of use, *jn* is used as an agentive preposition introducing a participant in postverbal position. One of them involves the quotative verb *j*. In this marginal but well-attested use, *jn* introduces the nominal agent that is both highly retrievable, in terms of discourse status, and non contrastive:

(12)

<i>j-t</i>	<i>jn</i>	<i>jhm.t</i>
say\PFV-3FS	AG	shore

‘she said, (namely) the shore ’ (CT V 195c)

In the following rare example, *jn* + Full Noun in final position does not follow a verb of saying:²²

(13)

<i>jr-n-f</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>mnw-f</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>jt看-f</i>	<i>m</i>
make\ANT-3MS	PREP	monument-3MS	to	fathers-3MS	PREP

<i>b3h</i>	<i>jn</i>	<i>jh3</i>
fore	AG	Iha

‘What he made as his monument for his forefathers, (namely) Iha’

This use has been labeled as ‘afterthought topic’.²³ However, given the highly formal character of the discourse from which the example derives, an afterthought is perhaps not the likeliest analysis. I suggest to consider *jn* + Noun here and in the preceding example as an antitopic.²⁴ In discourse, an antitopic may be defined as a highly identifiable term, indexed by a pronominal affix on the verb. It is integrated into the syntax and not dislocated, while an

²² Loprieno 1988 assumes that *jn* + Full Noun expresses a focus, while pronominal forms build on the *jn*- base may serve to topicalization. Formulated with a synchronic viewpoint, his analysis remains highly compatible with the diachronic evolution proposed here.

²³ Reintges (1998: 161), referring to Givon (1990: 760).

²⁴ Grossman 2015 analyses the antitopic status of marked postverbal subject in Coptic in a way that is not without connection to the reconstructed historical development of *jn* in proto-Egyptian. However, a crucial difference lies in the mandatory character of the marking in Coptic, a rare typological feature that is not found with *jn*.

afterthought is dislocated.²⁵ In terms of information structure, the antitopic is rhematic (fully informative, not a given in terms of information structure) rather than contrastive and represents the center of attention. Thus, it can serve to encode an agent that is not already given or presented as such in discourse but rather belongs to the more informative part of the utterance. The same holds true for the following example:

(14)

<i>smn-s</i>		<i>wj</i>	<i>jn</i>	<i>ʒst</i>	<i>hr</i>	<i>ʒkr</i>
establish\IMPFV-3FS		1MS	AG	Isis	PREP	earth

‘She establishes me, (namely) Isis, on earth’²⁶

From a diachronic point of view, this discourse property could also explain how the group *jn* + agent is used in thetic, all-rhematic passive constructions.²⁷ In a statement similar to example (9) for the informational content, but formulated with the Old Perfective in an asubjectal construction, the agent role is indeed expressed by a *jn*-phrase in the antitopic position. One may consider it as coreferential with a postverbal pronominal subject with no segmental expression, at least in the source construction of the pattern:

(15)

<i>jri</i>	<i>nw</i>	<i>jn</i>	<i>jmj-rʒ-pr</i>	<i>hm-kʒ</i>	<i>kʒj</i>
do\PFT	DEM	AG	overseer of the house	priest	Kai

‘This was done by the overseer of the house and priest Kai’²⁸

In that case, there is no focus on the agent as is the case with the participial statement, where identification of the agent is at stake. Such constructions represent the second main use of agentive *jn* in postverbal position. Here, the verbal form is the third person masculine Old Perfect, originally ambitransitive, whose active or passive reading depends on the expressed participants. The postverbal patient is part of the rheme and there is no participant with the function of topic.²⁹ The presence of agentive *jn* encodes the semantic role of the following noun phrase. In such a construction, all participants appear to be at the same informational level. This historical scenario makes it unnecessary to posit a former term focus construction as the source of *jn* encoding the agent in asubjectal constructions.³⁰

²⁵ Lambrecht (1981: 84-88).

²⁶ Gardiner (1957: 176).

²⁷ I use the term thetic with its classical meaning in information structure linguistic studies as referring to utterances that present a piece of information ‘in one chunk’ and show no topic-comment structure. Their information structure is also sometimes labeled ‘all-new’ or ‘all-rhematic’. See Lambrecht 1987 on the possible interplay between thetic information structure and formal strategies originally dedicated to other linguistic functions.

²⁸ Junker (1929: fig. 51, pl. 36).

²⁹ Alleged examples of the form with a pronominal patient encoded by a suffix pronoun belong to a distinct type of passive (Oréal 2017). The complementarity with the construction ‘pronominal patient + Pseudoparticiple’ does not hold under closer scrutiny, since a full noun patient can in fact occur in the latter if it has a thematic status in discourse.

³⁰ Reintges (1998: 172) postulates a path of emergence for the Agent marker in passive constructions from a former biclausal source construction involving a passive sentence followed by a truncated cleft sentence: ‘P is done, it’s A’ > ‘P is done by A’.

Within the proposed analysis, the incompatibility of agentive *jn* with a suffix pronoun finds a straightforward explanation.³¹ In a protohistorical stage of the language, it had indeed combined with the suffix pronoun under its current non initial form *n*. Such is the path of grammaticalization that gave birth to the Anterior *sdm-n-f* form.³²

4 Clausal *jn*: topics, conditionals and interrogation

In Earlier Egyptian, left-extraposed topicalization typically goes with another preposed marker with a prepositional origin, namely *jr*. It does not show any affinity with the Agent. A better understanding of the difference between *jn* and *jr* might first come from an analysis of their distinct use for introducing a conditional protasis. Semantically, *jr* appears neutral as to the status of the state of affairs expressed by the protasis:

(16)

<i>jr</i>	<i>pri-f</i>		<i>m</i>	<i>sbʒ</i>	<i>pw</i>	<i>jmnt-j</i>	<i>n-j</i>	<i>pt</i>
TOP	come_out\NMLZ-3MS		PREP	gate	DEM	west-ADJ	of-ADJ	sky
<i>jni</i>	<i>n-f</i>	<i>sbʒ</i>	<i>pw</i>	<i>rs-j</i>		<i>n-j</i>	<i>pt</i>	
bring\IMP	to-3MS	gate	DEM	south-ADJ		of-ADJ	sky	

‘If he comes out that gate west of the sky, bring him that gate south of the sky’³³

This is not the case when *jn* is used before a proposition that has the function of a protasis, much less frequently than *jr*. Thus, in the following example, *jn* introduces a protasis whose informational content is likely to be presented as granted by the speaker:

(17)

<i>jn</i>	<i>mri-tn</i>	<i>nh</i>	<i>jtmw (...)</i>		
TOP	like\NMLZ-2PL	live\IMPFV	Atum		
<i>šzp-tn</i>	<i>n-tn</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ppy</i>	<i>pn</i>
take\MOD-2PL	PREP-2PL	hand	of	Pepi	DEM

‘If (as I suppose you do) you want that Atum live (...), you shall take to you the hand of this Pepi’³⁴

The conditional use of *jr* is well-known and comes as no surprise for the typologist. In a classical paper, John Haiman showed that in many languages, there are some formal common features not only between conditionals and topics, but also between conditionals and

³¹ Reintges (1998: 218-20) interprets this problematic incompatibility of a ‘copular verb’ as resulting from the fact that suffix pronouns can never receive contrastive focus, but this analysis then conflicts with the fact that *jn* did combine with pronominal endings in the independent, not always focal, paradigm.

³² Werning (2008) is thus right in refuting the analysis of the *-n*-morph in the Anterior form as a result of the integration of agentive *jn*. However, *jn* and *n* ultimately represent distinct results of an evolution involving the same preposition *n*. With a synchronic point of view, Grandet & Mathieu (1991: 148) miss the point that the morpheme *-n* is not a short form of agentive *jn*, but rather *jn* originally is the full form of the preposition *n*.

³³ *Pyramid Texts* § 1252c-d.

³⁴ *Pyramid Texts* § 879b-§ 880aP.

interrogatives.³⁵ Within Güldemann's analysis of *jn* as presentative/identificational marker, this use is better related to a focus on truth-value:

‘While I cannot cite a case outside Egyptian where an identificational marker has been recruited to mark this function specifically in questions, it is attested in its affirmative declarative counterpart (...) in several Bantu languages, clause-initial identificational and presentational markers can have scope over an entire clause, which can be paraphrased as ‘It is (the case) that ...’, and in this use have come to encode predication focus involving in particular truth value-focus.(...) It is thus not far-fetched to hypothesize that a similar process has happened with identificational *jn* in Egyptian – the major difference being that it seems to have been more salient in the interrogative counterpart of the type ‘Is it (the case) that ...?’³⁶

Such an interpretation of interrogative *jn* is thus crucially dependent on the use of sentential *jn* as an emphatic assertive particle. However, it underestimates its highly dubious and marginal character. In order to understand better the way the particle *jn* contributes to encoding interrogative force, it is important to recall that its presence is not mandatory. First of all, intonation contour was probably sufficient to mark the utterance as a question in Egyptian. What does interrogative *jn* add in terms of semantics ? It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the use of *jn* in non-canonical interrogative utterances in all due details.³⁷ However, the following observations appear to be relevant to the question of its relationship to topicalization. Not any kind of polar question is in fact marked by *jn*.³⁸ From a pragmatic point of view, the speech act accomplished with *jn* is indeed not a mere request for information. The state of affairs expressed in the proposition often appears rather as a point considered as given and taken as a common ground by the speaker in order to justify a command or a wish, as shown in the following example:

(18)

<i>jn</i>	<i>wdi-k</i>	<i>tw</i>	<i>hr</i>	<i>gbt</i>	<i>nšmt-s</i>	<i>mj</i>
INTERR	throw\IMPFV-2MS	2MS	PREP	fish	scales-3FS	go\IMP

‘Are you throwing yourself at the fish and its scales (in the end) ? Go!’³⁹

In a caption belonging to a vividly depicted fishing scene, the addressee appears to take too much precaution before going to work. The speaker expresses ironical doubts on his comrade's willingness to come to do real work by using a non-canonical, biased question where no request for information is really at stake. The same is true in the following example:

(19)

<i>jn</i>	<i>jrr-t</i>	<i>r-j</i>	<i>r-gs-t</i>
INTERR	do\PCPL.DEF.PASS-F	PREP-1S	PREP-2FS

‘What about the things done against me at your side ?’⁴⁰

³⁵ Haiman 1978.

³⁶ Güldemann (2014).

³⁷ Dayan (2016: 268-273).

³⁸ Silverman (1980) illustrates this point abundantly.

³⁹ Steindorff (1913: pl. 115, 117).

In the context, there is a strong contrast between the questioned situation and the speaker's expectation. Accordingly, the latter is not asking for an information, but he expresses a protest by formulating a biased question.

In accordance with this pragmatic context, the German translation is often 'was soll das,...', the English one 'what does it mean, what about, how come, what is the meaning of ...'. However, one should not conclude from the use of a topic marker as a formal means to encode a special type of question that the verb forms following after interrogative *jn* have to be 'nominal' forms. The completed grammaticalization process of the particle involves a larger distribution that makes it able to have scope over a large type of verbal predication. As a sign that the end of the path has been attained, one also finds interrogative *jn* combined with the standard topic marker *jr*, as is the case in the following example:

(20)

<i>jn</i>	<i>jr</i>	<i>grt</i>	<i>pʒ</i>	<i>jr-t</i>	<i>bjn-w</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>ḥbswt-j</i>
INTERR	TOP	PTCL	DEM	do-INF	bad-PL	PREP	concubine-1S

'What does it means, concerning this doing bad thigs to my concubine ?'⁴¹

From a typological point of view, the use of interrogative as conditional clause is widely attested cross-linguistically. After Haiman, Elizabeth Traugott further elaborated on the ability of an interrogative clause to play the role of topic for a following speech act.⁴² The *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* confirms the complex relationship between these domains. It mentions both the well-known pathway of change from question to conditional and, more tentatively, from question to topic:

« The reason for tentatively proposing this pathway is that in a number of languages polar questions can be used in specific contexts to introduce topical constituents »⁴³

However, typological studies also evoke a fact that might be crucial for the understanding of Egyptian data, namely that some languages show common formal features shared by conditionals and polar interrogatives even when the conditional marker is not derived from an interrogative one:

« The close relationship between conditionals and polar interrogatives is also observable in languages that grammaticalised their conditional marker from a different domain or where the etymology of this marker is unknown »⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Gardiner & Sethe (1928: pl. 3).

⁴¹ Allen, J.P., *The Heqanakht Papyri*, PMMA 27, New York 2002, verso 16.

⁴² Traugott (1985: 294-95).

⁴³ Kuteva & al. (2019: 354).

⁴⁴ Haspelmath & al. (2008, 1014-1015).

Jespersen already proposed a model of discourse interaction that explores the motivation for using interrogation as a protasis in a conditional system in German. It is based on dialogue as the source for conditional construction.⁴⁵

A: Scheint die Sonne?

A : Is the sun shining?

B: Ja.

B: Yes.

A: So/Dann gehen wir baden.

A: Then we'll go for a swim.

The historical relevance of such a model has been contested as an example of 'Marker/Structure Fallacy', the idea that 'the sources of markers logically imply the sources of structures'.⁴⁶ Taking this objection into account, Van den Nest updates Jespersen's model from a point of view of grammaticalization. His study analyses the pragmatic context for the use of interrogatives as conditional along a line that appears to fit with the Egyptian data concerning *jn*. The crucial point lies in negotiating common ground between the interlocutors:

'By phrasing the antecedent as a polar interrogative, the speaker involves the interlocutor in constructing the hypothetical world'⁴⁷

This study suggests a distinct historical path according to which Germanthetic declaratives with the verb in first position were in fact remotivated as interrogative. It is thus interesting to note that the path leading to the formal common features between conditionals and interrogatives may involve a more complex explanation than interrogatives simply coming to be used as conditionals. Based on Egyptian data that favour an interpretation of *jn* as being originally a topic marker, I would like to suggest a path for the grammaticalization of polar interrogative where the topic marker is the source for the formal means of encoding (non-canonical) interrogative.⁴⁸ Such a proposal is tacitly present in Haiman's study, without being clearly formulated.⁴⁹ That conditionals and interrogatives share a semantic common feature that may be subsumed under the notion of topicality has also been formulated in a cognitive linguistics approach:

'The use of conditional *if* in English as an interrogative may be similarly analysed as an instance of metaphoric iconicity. The iconic ground is in this case 'given' or 'topic of a sort', a semantic aspect which is shared by the functions conditional and interrogative'⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Jespersen (1940: 374).

⁴⁶ Harris & Campbell (1995: 284).

⁴⁷ Van den Nest (2010: 115).

⁴⁸ The main sources identified in the typological literature for the emergence of polar question markers are negation, dubitative markers (perhaps), alternative markers (or) and insubordination of interrogative complementizers (if). See Evans 2007 on this notion.

⁴⁹ Haiman (1985: 27) points to the fact that questions may be used to introduce a topic.

⁵⁰ De Cuypere (2008: 101).

However, the suggested path from contrastive topic marker to non-canonical interrogative marker needs further qualification. What kind of semantic bridge can relate these uses ? In the discourse structure, a contrastive topic is initial and marks a shift in aboutness while establishing a given between speaker and hearer. Establishing this common ground raises the expectation of an apodosis or comment. In the presence of an explicit comment, the topic clause is read as a conditional:

As for p, apodosis > Is p true (as expected), apodosis

Suppressing the apodosis, the topic left alone becomes a biased interrogative speech act:

As for p > Is p true (as expected) ?

Thus, if no explicit clause comes as the expected apodosis, the topic clause may be pragmatically interpreted as a question. Thus, according to the context of utterance, the reading of the topic clause can be of more epistemic (condition) or pragmatic (interrogative) sort. The following example illustrates the kind of bridging use that may make the transition from topicalization to interrogative:

(21)

<i>jn</i>	<i>sr</i>	<i>pj</i>	<i>jni</i>	<i>sw</i>
TOP	goose	DEM	bring\IMP	3MS

‘As for this goose, bring it’⁵¹
‘Is it a goose ? Bring it’

A medical text also offers a possible interesting example in procedural discourse:

(22)

<i>jn</i>	<i>s^cq-t</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>qm³-t</i>	<i>h^cw-f</i>
TOP	enter\PCPL.PFV-FS	NEG	produce\PCPL.PFV-FS	body-3MS

‘As for something that was made enter, it is not something that his body produced’⁵²

The use of *jn* rather than *jr* here might relate to the fact that *jr* is used in the whole passage as a topic marker introducing each gloss, so that using the *jn* strategy as a means of encoding a topic allows a better distinction between different kinds of topics in the context.

5 Emphatic affirmative *jn*: a ghost use

In his reference grammar for Old Egyptian, Elmar Edel describes a few cases of *jn* used as a particle putting some emphasis on the affirmative force of the utterance. His clearest example is the following:⁵³

⁵¹ *Pyramid Text* § 1224bP.

⁵² Vernus (1982-1983: 123, example 8).

(23)

jn *tr* *rh-wj* *tw* *jrit* *mrr-t*
 TOP PTCL know\PCPL.PFV-DU 2MS do\INF like\PCPL.IMPFV-FS
hzz-t *nb-k*
 praise\PCPL.IMPFV-FS lord-2MS
jn *wrš-k* *sdr-k* *hr* *mḥ* *m*
 TOP spend_day\IPMPFV-2MS spend_day\IPMPFV-2MS PREP full\INF PREP
jrit *mrr-t* *hzz-t* *wd-t* *nb-k*
 do\INF like\PCPL.IMPFV-FS praise\PCPL.IMPFV-FS order\PCPL.IMPFV-FS lord-2MS
jw *ḥm-f* *r* *jrit* *sṣr-w-k*
 PTCL His Majesty PREP do\INF wish-PL-2MS

‘If ever you are really able to do what your lord likes and praises, if you spend night and day trying to do what your lord likes and praises, His Majesty will realize your wishes’⁵⁴

The passage of this letter from the king presents a typical conditional system, with a double protasis expressing conditions to be fulfilled for the king to realize his promise of reward (apodosis).⁵⁵ There is no need to postulate a distinct assertive meaning of *jn* to explain such a use of the particle. In the same way, the remaining examples are very rare and susceptible of an alternative interpretation, as is the following:

(24)

(j)n *jrf* *ni* *wnm-j* *ḥs*
 TOP PTCL NEG eat\IMPV feces
 ‘Is it then not the case that I shall not eat feces’⁵⁶

Topmann translates it as an assertive utterance.⁵⁷ However, her previous references to other interpretations show how this reading is but a semantic effect of non-canonical rhetorical interrogative. As noted by Sweeney, the speaker ‘is trying to make [the addressee] agree with him’.⁵⁸

6 Independent pronouns in Akkadian and in Egyptian

Free or independent pronouns represent a well-known potential isogloss between Akkadian and Ancient Egyptian:

	Akkadian ‘nominative’	Egyptian independent
1S	<i>an-ā-ku</i>	<i>jnk</i>

⁵³ Edel (1955-1964: 422).

⁵⁴ Sethe (1933: 129).

⁵⁵ The other example (Sethe 1933: 61, 2) cited by Edel shows the same structure.

⁵⁶ *Coffin Texts* III 86e (spell 186). The form *n* in this passage has been viewed as the full writing of the preposition *n* with a causal meaning. See Barta (1988: 56).

⁵⁷ Topmann (2002: 52).

⁵⁸ Sweeney (1991: 322).

2MS	<i>atta</i> < * <i>an-ta</i>	<i>jnt-k</i>
2FS	<i>atti</i> < * <i>an-ti</i>	<i>jnt-ṭ</i>
3MS	<i>šū</i>	<i>jnt-f</i>
3FS	<i>šī</i>	<i>jnt-s</i>

In the Egyptian paradigm, a likely motivation for the emergence and spread of the *jnt*-suffix pronoun may have been the loss of the gender distinction in the second person after the fall of final short vowels. The suffix pronouns were then used to make up for this functional loss in the second person. This process extended to third person by analogy.⁵⁹ The first person, unmarked for gender, remained untouched by this evolution. According to such a reconstruction, the first person of the independent pronoun has emerged from the combination of *jn* with the ending that also appears in the Egyptian Old Perfect and in the Akkadian Stative:

**jn-k* > *jnk*
‘as for me’ independent pronoun

Beyond the similarity of forms, there is a well-known mismatch between Akkadian and Egyptian as to the function of the pronouns with *an-/jn-* prefix. However, the function of Akkadian pronouns of the *an*-series is still open to discussion. Huehnergard (2011: 273) mentions the fact that the oblique pronoun *kâta* / *kâti* often occurs as subject with the nominative *anāku* in Old Babylonian letters. The idea that these pronouns were in fact not originally marked for case lies at hand.⁶⁰ Against this, I want to suggest that, similarly to what happens with Egyptian data, their origin and form might also be related to their original discourse function. According to this hypothesis, the so-called nominative of the Akkadian independent personal pronoun may actually represent not a Subject case strictly speaking but rather an emphatic form with contrastive semantics. Such a function appears to show again some possible link to topicalization. Contrastive emphasis indeed appears in a number of examples where the *an-* pronouns are used to encode extraposed topic. Thus, the following examples appear to show an extraposed topic with a verb form in the past:⁶¹

(25)
anāku *u* *atta* *ni-šbat*
1s and 2MS 1PL-seize\PAST
‘You and I (we) seized’

(26)
anāku *ward-am* *a-mḥur*
1CS servant-ACC 1CS-receive\PAST

⁵⁹ Kammerzell (1991: 192-93). See also Breyer (2003: 25).

⁶⁰ Hasselbach (2005: 150) also shows that in Sargonic Akkadian the original accusative form had no final *-t*, stating that « the origin of the forms of independent pronouns with infixed /t/ still requires further study ».

⁶¹ All Akkadian examples come from Huehnergard (2011). Gianto (1990: 50-53) illustrates the use of the free pronoun *anāku* as casus pendens in locative and existential sentences.

‘As for me, I received a male servant’

In the first sentence, the extraposed pronouns explicit the reference of the subject affix. In both examples, the free pronoun has the discourse function of a more or less contrastive topic. The same phenomenon is also found with a Stative form:

(27)

anāku *barī-āku*

1CS be_hungry\STAT-1CS

(who else is hungry in your house) ‘As for me, I am hungry’

According to John Huehnergard, examples showing the independent pronoun followed by the Stative should be understood as a *casus pendens* topicalizing the subject while the Stative ending remains the grammatical subject of the verb. This view has been challenged by Kouwenberg, according to whom the ending on the final verb is not a constituent but a person index.⁶² One may discuss the synchronic analysis, but from a diachronic point of view, I believe it is relevant to see it the way John Huehnergard does.

According to grammars, the same pronoun is also found in utterances with a marked focus on the subject in verbal clauses:

(28)

atta *ta-šriq*

2MS 2MS-steal\PAST

‘(It is) *you* (who) stole’

As is the case in Ancient Egyptian, the extension of use to encode focus might have also involves prosodic features that remain out of reach.

In nominal predication, another focus marker, *-ma*, needs also be used to encode focus when the *an-* pronoun is used. This fact also points to its primary function as marking the topic:

(29)

anāku-ma *rē’ūm* *mušallimum*

1CS-FOC shepherd bring_peace\PTCL

‘I am the shepherd who brings peace’

The same focus marker is also used with the third person pronoun when bearing the focus, so that one can assume that focus marking is no more inherent to the first person pronoun than to the pronoun *šū*:

(30)

⁶² Kouwenberg (2000: 30, n. 12)

šu-ma *šarraq*
 3MS-FOC be_a_thief\STAT
 ‘He himself is a thief’

Thus, only in some cases does the extraposed independent pronoun seem to bear a contrastive focus. If topic marking was the original use of the independent pronouns, what kind of path can one propose to explain such an evolution ? Again, semantically, contrastive emphasis appears as a likely bridge between topic use and use in sentences with marked contrastive focus:

Topic > **contrast** > focus

The free pronoun also appears as a subject in verbless clauses at the end of the sentence. In such cases, no emphasis seems to be present. Still, it represents the topic and not the focus or predicate in the clause and is not incompatible with its emergence as a topic, initial or not. Further study is still needed on the Akkadian word order in nominal predication.

7 The etymology of *jn*

Having proposed a path from topic marker to other functions of *jn*, I shall now come back to the question of its possible origin. From a morphological point of view, the relationship between *jr* + topic and the preposition (*j*)*r*, ‘towards, concerning’ is transparent. The same relationship may exist between the preposition *n*, ‘to’ and the full form *jn*:

(31)
jn *k³*
 to ka
 ‘For the ka’⁶³

It lies at hand to see in *jn* the former full form of the preposition *n* when placed at the beginning of an utterance.⁶⁴ Within the context of the participial statement, the full form *jn* was reanalyzed as marking the agent role while the nominal phrase extraposed to the left was reintegrated within the main nominal clause with zero copula:

(32)

<i>jn</i>	NP	<i>jrr</i>	Ø	>	<i>jn</i>	NP	<i>jrr</i>
TOP	NP	do\ PTCL	COP	>	AG	NP	do\ PTCL
‘As to NP, it is the one who does’				>	‘it is NP who does’		

⁶³ Edel (1955-1964: 757).

⁶⁴ See also also the king's utterance in Peasant: in-mrwt wn-f Hr-Dd gr ‘In order that he keep talking, be quiet’. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this example.

After gaining its remotivation as an agentive marker in this source construction, *jn* had its use extended to non-initial position. Semantically, the meaning ‘as for, as to’ fits perfectly well with the use of *jn* with an extraposed topic.⁶⁵

preposition *n* > *jn* + NP: initial topic marker
preposition *r* > *jr* + NP: initial topic marker

From a historical point of view, *jr* is the main marker of topicalization in Earlier Egyptian. The relationship between the two formations may have been both diachronic and functional or, alternatively, the explanation could be only diachronic. Thus, the use of *jr* as topic marker would have emerged after the evolution of *jn* from topic marker to agentive preposition in both focal and non-focal constructions took place. The fact that interrogative *jn* is already well-established in Old Egyptian may point to a diachronic relationship between an older and a more recent topic marker. However, even if the relationship between *jn* and *jr* is one of diachronic succession, the semantic profile of each marker may not be identical, thus explaining their respective further development. Thus, the distinct profiles of the source prepositions may be related to the distinct semantics of protasis marked by *jr* and *jn*:

Preposition	Protasis
<i>r</i> , ‘towards’ direction	conditional <i>jr</i> : unspecified viewpoint
<i>n</i> , ‘to’ direction reaching goal	conditional <i>jn</i> : common ground shared with addressee

From a comparative point of view, and going back to the possible cognate in Akkadian, one may now ask whether some corresponding linguistic feature is to be found in this language, as could be expected based on the similarity between Egyptian independent and Akkadian nominative free pronouns. The proposed analysis thus predicts the existence of a topic marker *an(a)* in Akkadian. The Akkadian preposition *an(a)*, ‘to, for’, whose special meaning ‘as regards, with respect to, concerning’ is well-attested,⁶⁶ is indeed employed with topicalized nominals too.⁶⁷ Thus in letters, *ana* may introduce a typical Aboutness topic:

- (33)
- | | | | |
|------------|---------------|-----------|-------------------|
| <i>ana</i> | <i>amt-im</i> | <i>ša</i> | <i>ta-trud-īm</i> |
| PREP | slave-GEN | REL | 2FS-send\PAST-1S |
- ‘As to the slave whom you sent me’⁶⁸

According to Khan (1984), it is frequent in omen texts such as the following:

- (34)
- | | | |
|------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <i>ana</i> | <i>marṣ-im</i> | <i>i-balluṭ</i> |
|------------|----------------|-----------------|

⁶⁵ On the relationship between an initial *jn* and the preposition *n*, see Gilula 1976, Barta 1988, 1989 and Fischer 1989.

⁶⁶ Von Soden (1965: 48).

⁶⁷ Von Soden (1995: 204-205).

⁶⁸ Huehnergard (2011: 261).

PREP sick-GEN 3MS-live\NPAST
 ‘As for the sick man, he will live’⁶⁹

Moreover, *ana* is part of the particle *aššum*, based on *ana* followed by a form of *šumum*, ‘name’, that is also used as a particle introducing a topic.⁷⁰ The crucial difference between Egyptian and Akkadian, namely the existence of a free morph *jn* used before nouns in the former thus appears less crucial than is usually assumed when comparing the similar basis of the free pronouns paradigms in both languages.⁷¹ Thus, according to the proposed reconstruction, the morphology of the Nominative free pronouns would result from the following process:

ana + *-aku* > *an-ā-ku*
*an*⁷² + *-ta* > *an-ta* > *atta*⁷³
an + *-ti* > *an-ti* > *atti*

The proposed analysis thus suggests a possible path of emergence for free emphatic pronouns as a preposition *an(a)* meaning ‘as to’ used to introduce a topic. Such a reconstruction also includes an explanation for the fact that Akkadian has no *jn*-form for the third person, since there is no pronominal ending corresponding to *-ku*, and *-ta*, *-ti*. The unexplained fact that the preposition *ana* does not occur with suffix pronouns could be related to its diachronic position within the history of the language. After combining with clitic pronouns of the older series *-ku*, *-ta*, *-ti*, a new combination with the series of suffix pronouns is not expected to happen. Here, one should mention the current discussion within Semitic linguistics about the possible reconstruction of the Akkadian preposition *ana* as **ha-na*.⁷⁴ However, this proposal is not without weaknesses.⁷⁵ Its relevance needs to be reevaluated in light of the likely stronger relatedness to Ancient Egyptian *jn*. In an Afroasiatic perspective, the question remains open whether common features in Ancient Egyptian and Akkadian only illustrate the parallel emergence of similar forms involving a common preposition and shared personal suffixes or whether they might be interpreted as the trace of a previous stage common to both languages. Whatever the answer to this question may be, the long known similarity between free and emphatic pronouns may now be interpreted in a new light.

8 Summary

⁶⁹ Khan (1984: 259).

⁷⁰ Khan (1984: 257-258).

⁷¹ Jansen-Winkel (2002: 18).

⁷² Von Soden (1995: § 13b) considers the short form *an* to be the result of final vowel loss. According to Hasselbach (2005: 168), it results from an analogy with the preposition *in*.

⁷³ Von Soden (1995: 204) states that the proclitic form of *ana* was easily assimilated to the following consonant.

⁷⁴ Huehnergard (2006: 16), in the wake of Christian (1924: 159), whose comparative methodology appears generally unsound (see the hypothesis about German preposition ‘*mit*’ related to deictic *n/m* in Semitic). Toniatti (2013: 139-140) tentatively proposes the same hypothesis.

⁷⁵ Kogan (2015: **li*). To his observations one may add Krebernik (2003: 305) according to whom the hadramitic *h-* found in the preposition ‘to’ comes from a former **l-* as is also the case with precative *l-*. In that case, the parallel with MSA appears even more precarious.

To sum up the hypothesis explored in this paper, I wanted to show that the hypothesis of an identificational copula or a focus marker is not the best way to account for all the uses of the Egyptian particle *jn*. Güldemann (2015) rightly mentions the common feature shared by the uses of *jn* before a noun in clefts, passive and as a quotative, namely its restriction to introducing a nominal with agentive role.⁷⁶ However, he gives no explanation for such a situation, which is not expected if the particle originates as a presentative or identificational marker. Why would such a particle be restricted to the agent-like semantic role? However, his statement that ‘the referent in the scope of *jn* is prototypically non-topical and in some way salient in pragmatic terms’, if restricted to a synchronic approach of its main uses, is indeed compatible with the present analysis, but his study focusses on an incomplete understanding of *jn*’s polyfunctionality and diachronic evolution. As a matter of fact, the seminal study by Loprieno (1988) had already brought to light crucial features of the particle as essentially agentive and marking pragmatic prominence but not necessarily focus. In the wake of his analysis, my argumentation proposes that the use of *jn* in focalizing constructions result from the reanalysis of a source construction with extraposed topic. Word order, and not *jn*, initially encodes focalization, with a likely contribution of prosodic features that remain out of reach to philology. The normal VSO word order in Older Egyptian makes the participial statement appear as a marked pattern involving a pragmatic and information structural motivation.

This approach allows for a better understanding of the emergence and evolution of Ancient Egyptian *jn* and Akkadian *an(a)* from a likely common source. Morphologically, it involves a preposition **an(a)-* used, among other functions, to introduce a lexical topic or a pronominal one. Internal changes within the history of each language result in a distinct, more extended polyfunctionality of *jn* in Earlier Egyptian.

Evolution internal to Akkadian:

- preposition
- contrastive free pronouns
- use as topic marker

Evolution internal to Egyptian:

- divergence between preposition *n* and initial *jn*
- contrastive emphatic pronouns
- emergence of agentive *jn* in agent or agent-like initial focus constructions and extension to constructions with postverbal agent
- development of conditional and interrogative *jn* < topic marker *jn*

Focussing on the Semitic preposition **l-*, comparative studies have neglected to consider the possibility that the Egyptian preposition (*j*)*n* and the Akkadian preposition *an(a)* could be cognates. There is no discussion about the fact that the formal resemblance between the two forms could represent a mere coincidence. However, when one takes into account their

⁷⁶ Güldemann (2014: 247-48).

partially common use in topicalization and as a base for the free/independent pronouns, this historical hypothesis becomes much more appealing.

As expected, linguistic typology by itself does not provide any answer as regards Egyptian data. However, it surely helps to understand what is at stake in analyzing the formal similarity between interrogation, conditionals and topics. The proposed path of change from topic to interrogative marker does not seem to have been clearly identified in typological literature on source constructions for question markers. However, it is implicitly present in functional and cognitive accounts of the use of interrogatives as conditionals. Thus, Egyptian data may contribute usefully to the typology of strategies used cross-linguistically to encode questions and conditions, as they provide an interesting case for a grammaticalization path from topic to both conditionals and non-canonical questions.

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