A Semantic Map of the Coptic Complementizer če- based on Corpus Analysis: Grammaticalization and Areal Typology in Africa

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Coptic forms the last stage of the Ancient Egyptian language, which constitutes by itself an independent branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family. The Coptic complementizer če- was grammaticalized from a bound form of the verb “say,” yielding a highly polysemous functional element. Next to continued homonymy with a form of the verb “say,” it is mainly used as a quotative marker introducing direct speech as in (1), but also to introduce names (2).

(1) peča-s na-f če-ou pe pai
   said-3SGF to-3SGM če-what COP.SGM DEM.SGM

   pa-šêre ...
   POSS.SGM:1SG-son ...

   “He said, ‘what is this, my son, …’” (Apophthegmata Patrum)

(2) hm-pou-ran če-apʰtʰonia
    by-POSS.SGM:2SGF-name če-Aphthonia

   “by your name ‘Aphthonia’” (Besa/To Aphthonia)

By a process of extension, če- came to mark object clauses of cognition verbs such as “know” (3), and perception verbs such as “see,” “hear” (4), as well as psych verbs such as “fear.”

(3) t-sooun če-e-k-t-oubê-i an
    1SG-know če-FOC-2SGM-give-against-1SG NEG

   “I know that it is not against me you fight,” (Shenoute/Not Because a Fox Barks)

(4) e-k-šan-sátm če-a-u-bôk e-m-ma
    COND-2SGM-COND-hear če-PST-3PL-go to-DEF.PL-place

   n-šine n-n-daimôn
   of-oracle of-DEF.PL-demon

   “if you hear that they have gone to the oracles of demons,” (Shenoute/Not Because a Fox Barks)
Evolving beyond a complementizer for embedded speech, če- developed further functions including causal marking (saying the reason → supplying a reason, (5)), use as part of a lexicalized complex marker ebol če- “because” (lit. “out of saying,” (6)), as well as a generic complementizer, e.g. introducing subject clauses without lexical or discourse relation contributions (7).

(5) če-ntok  
pe  
teu-helpis  
če-2SGM  
COP.SGM  
POSS.SGF:3PL-hope

“because you are their hope” (Shenoute/Not Because a Fox Barks)

(6) ebol  
če-se-šône  
out  
če-3PL-sick

“Because they are sick” (Apophthegmata Patrum)

(7) ou-katakrima  
na-k  
n-ouèr  
pe  
INDEF.SG-condemnation  
to-2SGM  
of-how_much  
COP.SGM  
če-k-paraba  
hm-pe-hme  
n-hoou  
če-2SGM-transgress  
in-DEF.SGM-40  
of-day

“How much of a condemnation is it to you, that you transgressed in the 40 days?” (Shenoute/Not Because a Fox Barks)

Shisha-Halevy (1991:202) indicated the adnominal usage of če which is a characteristic of Shenoutean Sahidic (8).

(8) mmn-ce-pistis  
mmn-ce-helpis  
n-hôb  
NEG.EXIST-other-faith  
NEG.EXIST-other-hope  
of-thing  

n-agat’on  
če-n-f-šoop  
na-s  
an  
of-goodness  
če-NEG-3SGM-belong  
to-3SGF  
NEG

“There is no faith, there is no hope of goodness that does not belong to it” (Chassinat 1911:125.38ff. quoted and translated by Shisha-Halevy 1991:202)

Finally, Shisha-Halevy (1986:78) also suggests a possibility that there is a usage of če- denoting “as if” with a circumstantial clause (9).
“(They raise their hands) in the hypocrisy as if they were praying” (Leipoldt 1908:45.5, also quoted by Shisha-Halevy 1986:78, footnote 84)

In this paper, we explore the semantic map of če- in Coptic corpora from Coptic SCRIPTORIUM (http://copticscriptorium.org/, cf. Schroeder and Zeldes 2016) using quantitative analysis across genres and periods. We analyze its grammaticalization process against the background of Pre-Coptic Egyptian corpora from the Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae (http://aaew.bbaw.de/), and draw a semantic map of this grammaticalization pattern. There are two possible scenarios of the historical change of če-: (i) developed from r-Dd as in (10) (cf. Collier 2007:43-6), (ii) developed from m-Dd as in (11). Stéphane Polis also discusses the grammaticalization path and the semantic conditions of the extension of Dd to perception verbs at length in his Ph.D. thesis (Polis 2009:344-97).

(10) sdm(=j) r-Dd nz rm₄ hn
hear.PST(-1SG) r-Dd DEF.PL people proceed.STAT
r jr-t hw m pṣj pr-n-sṯš
to take-INF possession in DEM.SGM portable_chest

“I noted that the people proceeded to take possession of this portable chest (i.e., funerary equipment).” (pMayer Ar. 1, 14-15, Junge 2001:219, quoted and glossed by Kramer 2012:102-3, ex. 55)

(11) jw=tw r-qd-t ṭrq pṣ z 2 m-dd (...) COMP=DETR FUT-give-INF swear DEF.SGM man 2 m-dd

“The two men shall be made to swear as follows: (...)” (P. UC 32055, ro 9, transcribed, glossed and translated by Stauder 2014:468, ex. 10)

Finally, we consider areal aspects of the phenomenon from a typological perspective based on Güldemann’s work on quotatives in Africa (Güldemann 2008).

Bibliography


