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Egyptian non-selective interrogative pronominals: history and typology[*]

Abstract: Non-selective interrogative pronominals (NIPs) are interrogative pronominals such as *who*? and *what*? in English, that are used in non-selective contexts. In this paper, I examine NIPs throughout the recorded history of the Egyptian language from the perspective of a typology of NIPs proposed by Idiatov (2007), where NIPs are defined through their functions in terms of prototypical combinations of values. I focus on the analysis of the attested shifts in the patterns of use of different NIPs and the development of new NIPs in the course of the history of the Egyptian language. When both the formal and functional differentiation of Egyptian NIPs are considered from a broader Afro-Asiatic perspective, the NIP system of Egyptian appears to have evolved from a more Berber-like situation in Old and Middle Egyptian to a more Semitic/Cushitic-like situation in Late, Demotic and Coptic Egyptian.

1 Introduction

Non-selective interrogative pronominals (NIPs) are interrogative pronominals used in non-selective contexts, where the speaker perceives the choice as free. These are forms equivalent to English *who?* and *what?*. In selective contexts, where the choice is perceived by the speaker as being restricted to a closed set of similar alternatives, selective interrogative pronominals such as English *which (one)?* are used.

In the present paper, I examine NIPs throughout the recorded history of the Egyptian language, from Old Egyptian to Coptic. Given the exclusively written nature of the available sources, I start in § 2 by discussing the challenges that the pre-Coptic Egyptian writing systems pose for the analysis of Egyptian NIPs. As to the analysis itself, I approach Egyptian NIPs from the perspective of a typology of NIPs proposed by Idiatov (2007). I briefly present this typology in §3. This

typology is most interested in two parameters of variation in the domain of NIPs. The first parameter concerns the formal differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?' or the lack thereof in a given language. The second parameter is about the functional differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?' in languages where they are formally distinguished. I examine how Egyptian NIPs behave with respect to these two parameters in §§4 and 5 respectively. In both sections, I also address the question of how we can account for the attested shifts in the patterns of use of different NIPs and the development of new NIPs in the course of the history of the Egyptian language. Finally, in §6, I consider Egyptian NIPs from a broader Afro-Asiatic perspective.

2 The challenges of the pre-Coptic Egyptian writing systems

The three pre-Coptic Egyptian writing systems are hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic.[1] Roughly speaking, hieratic and (later) demotic scripts are cursive analogues of the hieroglyphic script. Although the pre-Coptic Egyptian scripts are predominantly phonetic and only partially ideographic, their usability for many kinds of linguistic research is hampered by the fact that they are almost exclusively consonantal.[2] Generally speaking, vowels (and their quality) are marked with certain regularity only in demotic script (Lexa 1947–1951: 9), which is the latest of the three pre-Coptic Egyptian scripts. However, it is only with the Coptic script based on the Greek alphabet that vowels become fully specified in writing. It is hard to overlook the consequences that this underspecification inherent to the script may have on the strength of the claims that we can make about Egyptian. The challenge is particularly important in the case of Egyptian NIPs because

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1 I present Egyptian examples in the traditional Egyptological transliteration, as can be found in Gardiner (2001: §19). The letter and number given in brackets after a hieroglyphic sign, such as 𓅱 (G43), represent the codes of Gardiner's ([1957] 2001) classification of hieroglyphs traditionally used in Egyptology.

2 The only two exceptions may be represented by the signs 𓅱 (G43) and 𓇌 (M17), usually transliterated as *w* and *ỉ ~ j* respectively. These signs, especially 𓇌 *ỉ ~ j*, are believed to represent not only the approximants /w/ and /j/ but also "a vowel that was present in presumably an unexpected position, without necessarily indicating what vowel was present" (Callender 1975: 3). A vocalic interpretation appears to be most plausible word-initially. The double sign 𓇌𓇌 (or 𓏭), usually transliterated as *y*, is hardly found as initial letter and may represent just a graphic variation of its singleton counterpart (Callender 1975: 3, 5).

these are short words and the possibility remains that what is considered as one NIP with two meanings are in fact two NIPs with different vocalizations corresponding to two different meanings.

Nevertheless, as some indirect evidence suggests, the probability of the latter situation is actually rather low. First, although lexical homographs are usually further distinguished by means of additional signs, the so-called "determinatives", this never seems to be done for interrogative pronominals. A given interrogative pronominal is rendered with the same sign(s) whether it means 'who?' or 'what?', which strongly suggests that it is always one and the same interrogative. At the most, even if one writing does stand for more than one interrogative differing only in their vowels, any difference possibly expressed this way was not lexical, 'who?' vs. 'what?', but grammatical of some kind, e.g., difference in case, the so-called "state", focus, etc. Second, it appears that the agreement patterns associated with a presumed 'who?, what?' interrogative pronominal do not depend on whether it means 'who?' or 'what?'. Third, more than one unrelated 'who?, what?' interrogatives are recorded, which is indicative of a certain recurrent pattern in the development of Egyptian interrogative pronominals. Furthermore, for at least one of these interrogatives, *pw* (more common in combination with a particle as *pw-tr*/ *pw-tỉ*/ *ptr*/ *pty*/ *pt*), Gardiner (2001: §497) has suggested a single source, a demonstrative *pw* 'DEM.M.SG', which implies that the writings representing the respective interrogative are also likely to have only one vocalization for both 'who?' and 'what?'. Finally, additional indirect evidence in favor of the existence of 'who?, what?' interrogatives in Egyptian is provided by the fact that such interrogatives are common in Berber (cf. Idiatov 2007: 155–180), another branch of Afro-Asiatic which is geographically, and probably genetically, one of the closest to Egyptian.

3 A typology of non-selective interrogative pronominals

As argued in Idiatov (2007), from a typological perspective NIPs are best defined through their functions in terms of prototypical combinations of values. Thus, 'who?' is an NIP that prototypically asks for the identification of a person and that expects a proper name as a typical answer. The interrogative 'what?' is an NIP prototypically asking for the classification of a thing and expecting a common noun as an answer. These definitions of 'who?' and 'what?' are idealizations resulting out of the interaction between several parameters within a single conceptual space, as represented in Figure 1.

Values

ENTITY TYPE	PERSON		THING

[ANIMATE <**INANIMATE** > ABSTRACT]

TYPE OF REFERENCE

Parameters

IDENTIFICATION	CLASSIFICATION
(DIRECT REFERENCE)	(REFERENCE VIA A CONCEPT)

EXPECTED ANSWER	PROPER NAME	COMMON NOUN
		(DESCRIPTION, APPEL-LATIVE)

who?   what?

Interrogative pronominal

Figure 1: Conceptual space for delimiting the prototypical functions of non-selective interrogative pronominals (Idiatov 2007: 18)

Strictly speaking, the third parameter expected answer is somewhat redundant, since its values can be defined in terms of prototypical correlates of the second parameter type of reference. However in some cases expected answer does play an irreducible role in the choice of an interrogative pronominal, as in example (2) below.

We may call the combinations of values [person + identification (+ proper name)] and [thing + classification (+ common noun)] prototypical combinations of values with respect to the choice of a non-selective interrogative pronominal. Note that this does not imply at all that questions about classification of persons or identification of things are less natural in any sense. What this means is that the latter two kinds of questions are not prototypically associated with one of the two NIPs, viz. 'who?' and 'what?'. This is why, for instance, different languages distinguishing between 'who?' and 'what?' may opt for a different NIP in cases of such non-prototypical combinations of values. For instance, consider example (1) from Russian and its English translation where we have a non-prototypical combination of values [person + classification (+ common noun)]. I will refer to examples like (1) as KIND-questions.

Russian

(1) A   on **kto**   voobšče? Doktor?
    and he **who** actually   doctor
  '**What** is he actually? A doctor?'

We may say that English and Russian give preference to different parameters. That is, English prefers the TYPE OF REFERENCE, viz. what matters is that the question is about [classification]. The preference for TYPE OF REFERENCE is manifested by what we may call 'what?'-dominance, that is in English 'what?' wins over 'who?' in the case of this particular non-prototypical combination of values. At the same time, Russian prefers the parameter ENTITY TYPE, viz. what matters is that the question is about a [person], and this preference is manifested by 'who?'-dominance, since 'who?' wins over 'what?'.

Another non-prototypical combination of values [thing + identification (+ proper name)] that I will refer to as NAME-questions is found in (2).

Kgalagadi (Niger-Congo, Bantu S30; Botswana; Kems Monaka, p.c.)

(2) [A:] *libizho   la   lehelo   lo   ke **anye?***
         G5.NAME AG5.CON G11.place AG11.DEM COP **who**
    [B:] *ke Hughunsi*
         COP PROP
    '[A:] **What** (lit.: 'who?') is the name of this place? [B:] It's Hukuntsi (a
        village name)'

Here again, we may say that English and Kgalagadi give preference to different parameters. Thus, English prefers ENTITY TYPE, viz. what matters is that the question is about a [thing], viz. the name of a place, whereas Kgalagadi prefers TYPE OF REFERENCE (& EXPECTED ANSWER), viz. what matters is that the question is about [identification] (& a [proper name]). The preference for ENTITY TYPE in English is manifested by 'what?'-dominance and the preference for TYPE OF REFERENCE (& EXPECTED ANSWER) in Kgalagadi is manifested by 'who?'-dominance.

Many languages treat non-human living beings similarly to humans in various respects and some also use 'who?' in questions about them, as in (3) from Russian, which can be considered a third, minor instance of a non-prototypical combination of values, viz. [animate thing + classification (+ common noun)], that I will refer to as ANIMATE-questions.

Russian

(3) ***Kto*** *èto tebja ukusil?*
  who this you bit
  '[Looking at a swelling on someone's hand clearly caused by an insect bite:] What stung you? (e.g., a wasp, a bee, etc.)'

Leaving aside some possible complications, the non-prototypical combinations of values presented above yield the typology of 'who?'/'what?'-dominance shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The full typology of 'who?'/'what?'-dominance in cases of non-prototypical combinations of values (Idiatov 2007: 119)

		KIND-questions	NAME-questions	ANIMATE-questions	Prominence
1	a	'who?'	'who?'	'who?'	'who?'
	b			('what?')	
2	a	'who?'	'what?'	'who?'	ENTITY TYPE
	b			('what?')	
3		'what?'	'who?'	('what?')	TYPE OF REFERENCE
4		'what?'	'what?'	('what?')	'what?'
5		'what?'	'what?'	'who?'	mixed (4/2a)
6		'what?'	'who?'	'who?'	mixed (3/2a)

It should be added that there is also a minority of languages to which the typology presented in Table 1 does not really apply since they do not oblige their speakers to distinguish formally between 'who?' and 'what?'. To be more precise, a lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' in a given language implies that one form can be used for both [person + identification (+ proper name)] and [thing + classification (+ common noun)], which are the two prototypical combinations of values with respect to the choice of a NIP. For considerations of space, I will not discuss possible complications here. Let us just consider a clear example of lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' from Poitevin, the dialect of French spoken in the Poitou region (4).

Poitevin French

(4) a. *Qui qu'est   venu?*
    IPN REL-is   come.PST.PTCP
    'Who came?' (Mineau 1982: 255 via Rottet 2004: 173)

   b. *Qui qu'tu   manges?*
    IPN REL-2SG eat.PRS.2SG
    'What are you eating?' (Mineau 1982: 255 via Rottet 2004: 173)

To sum up, some languages do not oblige their speakers to distinguish formally between 'who?' and 'what?', although most languages do. Languages differ considerably in how they accommodate non-prototypical combinations of values.

4 Egyptian non-selective interrogative pronominals: formal differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?'

4.1 From Old Egyptian to Coptic: an overview

4.1.1 Old and Middle Egyptian

Older stages of the Egyptian language are characterized by the presence of several NIPs that are attested as both 'who?' and 'what?', viz. *m*, *pw* and *zy*. These will be discussed in more detail in §§4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 respectively. Example (5) with *m* 'who?, what?' from Old Egyptian will suffice here as an illustration.

Old Egyptian

(5) a. *ỉrỉ-n-ỉ*   *m?*
    do.PFV.M-of-1SG.SUF IPN
    'What have I done? (lit.: 'The one that has been done by me (is) what?')'
    (Edel 1964: 517)
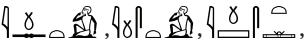
   b. *m*   *ḥwỉ-n-k?*
    IPN beat.REL.M-of-2SG.M.SUF
    'Whom have you beaten? (lit.: '(It is) who which has been beaten by you?')' (Edel 1964: 516)

The Old and Middle Egyptian interrogative pronominals are summarized in (6) in both transliteration and hieroglyphic script. Some rare hieroglyphic variants may be missing.

(6) Old and Middle Egyptian interrogative pronominals (based on Allen 2000; Edel 1955, 1964; Callender 1975; Gardiner 2001; Loprieno 1996; Vernus 2006)

a. *m, mỉ*   'who?, what?'

b. *pw*   'who?, what?'
   pw-tr
   pw-tỉ
   p-tr
   p-ty (p-tỉ)
   p-t

c. *ỉš-st*   'what?'
   ỉš-sy

d. *ỉḫ*   'what?'

e. *zy (zỉ), sy (sỉ)*   'which [N]?, what (kind
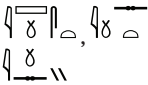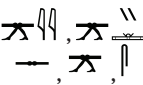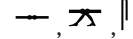   *z, s*   of) [N]?' (person or
   thing), 'which one?,
   who?, what?'

The interrogative *pw* is not attested in Old Egyptian texts (Edel 1955: 90) and is very rare in Middle Egyptian (Gardiner 2001: §498). Nevertheless, it is believed to be old (Edel 1955: 90). According to Gardiner (2001: §497), the interrogative *pw* stems from the demonstrative *p-w* 'M.SG-DEM'. The other, more frequent forms in (6b) result from a combination of *pw* with a particle *tr/ ty/ tỉ/ t* 'actually, forsooth, I wonder'.

The interrogative *ỉḫ* 'what?' goes back to a feminine noun (*ỉ*)*ḫ-t* 'thing(s), something, property' (-*t* is the feminine suffix) (cf. Gardiner 2001: §501). The

initial part *iš-* of the interrogative *iš-st/ iš-sy* 'what?' has the same origin.[3] Its final part *-st* is the dependent pronoun *st* (Allen 2000: 55), analyzed by Allen (2000: 49) as "neutral in gender and number" and referring to things ("nouns or plurals" other than those designating "living beings (people or gods)"). By analogy, the variant *-sy* is likely to be the feminine third person dependent pronoun *sy (sî)*. The interrogative *iš-st/ iš-sy* 'what?' appears then to be a lexicalization of an original cleft structure 'It (she) is the thing [(that)...]?' → 'what is it (she) [(that)...]?' → 'what?'. In this respect, note that Old Egyptian questions with *iš-st/iš-sy* are commonly framed as clefts (see Edel 1964: 517), as in (7).

Old Egyptian

(7) *išst pw ḥm n-n irrw-tn*?
what COP indeed N-DEM do.IPFV.REL.M-2PL.SUF
'What is it that you are doing?' (Edel 1964: 517)[4]
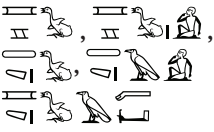
4.1.2 Late and Demotic Egyptian

In later stages the lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' gradually disappears either through specialization of the respective NIPs in one of the two meanings, viz. 'who?' in the case of *m* and its later derived forms and 'what?' in the case of the *pw*-based interrogatives, or through loss of the interrogative, as in the case of *zy*. Thus, consider the Late Egyptian interrogative pronominals in (8) and the Demotic Egyptian interrogative pronominals in (9).

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3 The link between the word for 'thing' and *iš* can be supported by the fact that in Old Egyptian, *iḫt* was written as *išt* before suffixes (Hannig 2003: 200–201). However, I am reluctant to accept Allen's (2000: 55) hypothesis that *iš-* of the interrogative *išst/išsy* originates in the interrogative *iḫ* 'what?'. Rather, *iḫ* 'what?' represents a later development from the same source, the noun 'thing, something'. In this respect, note that while *iš-st/iš-sy* is well attested in Old Egyptian, *iḫ* 'what?' is not (cf. Edel 1955: 90, 1964: 515–518). Furthermore, *iḫ* is also rare in Middle Egyptian becoming common only in Late Egyptian (Gardiner 2001: §501).
4 The masculine agreement on the verb here is controlled by the neuter demonstrative *nn*. According to Gardiner (2001: §511, §111), the demonstratives of the *n*-series trigger masculine (singular) agreement on "participles and relative forms".

(8) Late Egyptian interrogative pronominals (based on Černý 1978; Erman 1968; Junge 1996; Korostovtsev 1973 and Lesko & Lesko 2002–2004)

a. *nym (nîm)*   〰🐦(𓀀), 〰🐦𓂝𓀀 , 🐦   'who?'

   m   ▭𓂝   'who?, what?'

b. *îḫ*   𓇋𓏤𓏠   'what?'

c. *it(î)*   𓏏𓃀 , 𓏏𓃀𓀀 ,   'which [N]?',
   𓂧𓃀, 𓂧𓅡𓀀   'where?', 'which
   𓂧𓃀𓅡𓂝   one?, who?'

d. *ptr*   𓊪𓏏𓂋𓁹   'what?, where?'

(9) Demotic interrogative pronominals (based on du Bourguet 1976; Johnson 2001; Lexa 1947–1951 and Spiegelberg 1925)[5]

nm, nim(e)   'who?'
îḫ   'what?', 'what (kind of) [N] (person or thing)?'[6]

The Late Egyptian interrogative *nym* (*nîm*) results from a combination of the interrogative *m(î)* with the preceding subject focus particle *în* (Gardiner 2001: §496; Edel 1964: 515; Till 1986: 102), as in (10) and (11).

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[5] The original forms in demotic script are not provided due to difficulties with their reproduction. In Demotic data, some sources use the transliterations *a* and *e* because of their usual Coptic outcomes, ⲁ and ⲉ, (in hieroglyphic writing, these transliterations correspond to 𓇋ⲉ (M17-Z7) and ⲟⲩl (D21-Z1)), otherwise they are transliterated as *r* and *î(w)*, respectively (Lexa 1947–1951: 44; du Bourguet 1976: 3–4). Other transliterations that sources may differ on are '~ *î* and *i ~ y*. The latter variant in both cases is the same as in transliterations of earlier Egyptian data.
[6] The attributive glosses 'which [N]?', 'what (kind of) [N]?' refer to the use of *îḫ* as the syntactic head of a genitive construction marked by *n* 'of', with the latter sometimes omitted, as in *îḫ* (*n*) *îꜥbꜣ*? 'what illness?' (Spiegelberg 1925: 19).

Middle Egyptian

(10) *(ỉ)n   m   tr   tw?*
    SBJ.FOC IPN actually 2SG.M.DEP
    'Who are you then?' (Loprieno 1996: 121), 'Who pray art thou?' (Gardiner 2001: §496)

(11) *ỉn   m   dd   sw?*
    SBJ.FOC IPN say.IPFV.(M) 3SG.M.DEP
    '[A:] What expresses it? [B: Twenty expresses it].' (Gardiner 2001: §495; Callender 1975: 97)

The tendency towards the fusion of the combination *ỉn m(ỉ)* is already clear in Middle Egyptian. That by the Late Egyptian period this combination has already fused into a monomorphemic word is indicated by (i) the complete loss of the initial *ỉ* of *ỉn*, (ii) the introduction of the medial sign ⟍ (Z4) *y* (*ỉ*) in *nym* (*nỉm*), which is generally believed to render the vowel *i*, (iii) the use of *nym* with prepositions, as a direct object (cf. Korostovtsev 1973: 82), or with the subject focus particle *ỉn* (Jean Winand, p.c.).

The rare Late Egyptian interrogative *ỉt(ỉ)* 'which [N]?, where?, which one?, who?' is found "only in texts of refined language" (Erman 1968: 376). According to Hoch (1994: 43–44), it was borrowed from Semitic and can be reconstructed as **ē-ḏē< **ay-ḏē*, where the first part is a widespread Semitic interrogative root 'which (one)?, where?' and the second part is a demonstrative, similar for instance to the Classical Arabic demonstrative root *ḏā*.

4.1.3 Coptic Egyptian

In the Egyptian language of the Coptic period, the interrogatives meaning 'who?' and 'what?' are formally differentiated. Coptic interrogative pronominals are summarized in (12). In brackets, I indicate the dialect for which a given form is attested. An asterisk preceding the name of the dialect means that a given form is considered by Vycichl (1984) to be "aberrant" for this dialect.

(12) Coptic interrogative pronominals (based on Crum 1962; Lambdin 1983; Plumley 1948; Till 1961, 1986; Vycichl 1984; Jean Winand, Eitan Grossman, p.c.)[7]

a.	ⲚⲒⲘ	*nim* (Bohairic, Sahidic)	'who?', 'which [N]?', what (kind of) [N]? (person or thing)', 'which (one)? (person or thing) (predicative)'

b.	ⲞⲨ	*ou* (Sahidic, Bohairic)	'what?', 'what (kind of) [N] (thing)?'
	ⲞⲨⲞ	*ouo* (Akhmimic)	
	ⲞⲨⲱ	*ouō* (*Sahidic)	
	ⲞⲨⲀ	*oua* (*Oxyrhynchitic)	
	Ⲟ	*o* (Akhmimic, Lycopolitan)	
	ⲱ	*ō* (Akhmimic, *Sahidic)	
	ⲈⲨ	*eu* (Lycopolitan, Sahidic)	

c.	ⲀⲰ	*aš* (Bohairic, Sahidic)	'what (kind of) [N]?, which [N]? (thing)', 'which one (thing)?', 'what? (predicative)'
	ⲈⲰ	*eš* (Lycopolitan, Fayyumic)	
	ⲈϨ	*ex* (Akhmimic)	
	ⲀϨ	*ax* (Proto-Theban)	

The interrogative *aš* is usually assumed to go back to the pre-Coptic interrogative *iḫ* 'what?' (Vycichl 1984: 20). The interrogative *ou* must be a Coptic innovation because it is not attested in any earlier form of Egyptian. Vycichl (1984: 228) suggests that together with a formally identical singular indefinite article, it goes back to the numeral 'one', which in Middle Egyptian was written as *wˤ* and which in Sahidic Coptic had the forms *oua* (ᴍ) and *ouei* (ꜰ). In Coptic, the numeral is also used as an indefinite, but only about persons as '(a certain) one, a certain man/woman, someone' (Lambdin 1983: 64; Till 1986: 105–106).

When the attributive glosses 'which [N]?', what (kind of) [N]?' are used in (12), syntactically the respective interrogative pronominal functions as the head of a genitive construction marked by *n* 'of' (or its allomorph *m*), as in (13) with *nim*.

Coptic Egyptian

(13) a. *nim n-rōme*
ɪᴘɴ of-man
'which man?' or 'what (kind of) man?' (Lambdin 1983: 62; Till 1986: 102)

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7 When transliterating Coptic data, I follow the conventions in Lambdin (1983: x).

b. *nim m-prohoimion*
   IPN of-preface
   'what (kind of) preface?' or 'which preface?' (Crum 1962: 225)

The use of *nim* with this semantics as the head of the genitive construction with non-human nouns, as in (13b), is a Coptic innovation as compared to the Late Egyptian and Demotic data. Equally innovative are the occasional occurrences of a predicative *nim* with a selective meaning in questions about non-humans instead of the regular *aš*, as in (14).

Coptic Egyptian

(14) *aš / nim gar   pe   p-noč?*
     IPN   because M.SG.COP DEF.ART.M.SG-great
     '[Fools and blind!] For which is greater, [the gold, or the temple that
     sanctifies the gold]?' (Matthew 23: 17 in Crum 1962: 225; Eberle & Schulz
     2004: 15; Till 1986: 102; Wells 2000–2006)[8]

The two new uses of *nim* in Coptic may be due to an Ancient Greek influence. Whereas Late Egyptian *nym* (*nỉm*) and Demotic *nm*, *nim*(*e*) functioned as exclusively human NIPs 'who?', their Coptic reflex *nim* has a much broader scope of use, in which it bears strong resemblance to the Ancient Greek non-neuter interrogative pronominal *tis* (NON‹N›.SG.NOM). The latter is often glossed only as 'who?', but this is misleading. Its common human interpretation is really derivative of its gender specification and can be perfectly absent, as in (15) and (16), which are parallel to the Coptic examples (13) and (14) respectively.

Ancient Greek

(15) a. *tines   aneres*
        IPN.NON‹N›.PL.NOM man.M.PL.NOM
        'which/what men?' (Bailly 1901: 873)

   b. *tis   achô*
      IPN.NON‹N›.SG.NOM sound.F.SG.NOM
      'which/what sound?' (Liddell & Scott 1940 under *tis*)

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8 The use of *nim* in Matthew 23: 17 in some of its Sahidic and Bohairic versions is reported by Crum (1962: 225). The other sources cited give only *aš*.

(16) *tis*   *gar*   *meizôn*   *estin*
      IPN.NON‹N›.SG.NOM because greater.M.SG.NOM be.PRS.ACT.IND.3SG
      ho   *chrusos*   *ê*   *ho*
      DEF.ART.M.SG.NOM gold.M.SG.NOM or DEF.ART.M.SG.NOM
      naos?
      temple.M.SG.NOM
      '[Fools and blind!] For which is greater, [the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold]?' (Matthew 23: 17)

The Ancient Greek examples (15) and (16) are parallel to the Coptic examples (13) and (14) respectively. However, whereas the use of *tis* in Greek here can be readily accounted for by its non-neuter gender specification, a similar system-internal explanation is lacking for the use of *nim* in Coptic. Given that Ancient Greek is otherwise well known to have exerted significant impact on Coptic, especially on its lexicon, this is indicative of a Greek influence on the use of Coptic *nim*.

4.2 Egyptian NIPs allowing for a lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?'

4.2.1 *m* 'who?, what?'

The use of *m* as 'who?' and 'what?' in Old and Middle Egyptian was illustrated in (5), (10) and (11). As argued in §2, there is some strong indirect evidence that what is transliterated as *m* is indeed one and the same interrogative irrespective of whether it means 'who?' or 'what?'. Among other things, an important piece of evidence comes from the fact that no consistent link can be established between one of the two meanings, viz. 'who?' or 'what?', and a given hieroglyphic writing of the interrogative *m*. That is, the differences in its hieroglyphic form do not represent differences in its lexical meaning.

    In Old Egyptian, the most typical writing of this interrogative is the bare phonogram 𓅓 *m* (G17) (Edel 1955: 90, 1964: 515–517), which would normally imply that it was realized as /m(V)/. What is relevant here is the absence of a vowel before *m* and of a second consonant at the end.[9] The presence of a final vowel or

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9 Certain (sentence-initial) "remarkable writings" ("auffälligen Schreibungen") reported for Old Egyptian by Edel (1964: 516–517), viz. 𓅭𓅓 (M17-G17) and 𓅭𓅓𓂧 (M17-G17-D35), might at first sight suggest the presence of a vowel before *m*. However, it is much more likely that they represent contractions of *ỉn m* (where *ỉn* is the subject focus particle) due to assimilation, viz. *ỉm(m)*

its possible quality cannot be established with certainty. In fact, it is quite possible that the transliteration *m* covers several morphosyntactically conditioned variants, such as /m/, /mi/ or /ma/. In this respect, compare the situation in Ait Ndhir Tamazight, a Northern Berber Afro-Asiatic language spoken in Morocco. Thus, Ait Ndhir Tamazight has an interrogative *m* 'who?, what?, which one?', which is normally used in a cleft construction in combination with the gender-number neutral demonstrative pronominal *ay* (with allomorphs *agg-* and *a*),[10] as in (17–19), and in a few contexts on its own, as in (20).

Ait Ndhir Tamazight (Penchoen 1973: 79)

(17) *m   ay   nttannay   asəkka?*
IPN DEM FUT.1PL.SBJ.see tomorrow
'Whom/what shall we see tomorrow?' (lit.: 'Who/what is it that we shall see tomorrow?')

(18) *m   aggədda   yər-ṯaddarṯ?*
IPN DEM.3SG.M.SBJ.go.PFV.PTCP.SG to-house
'Who has been to the house?' (lit.: 'Who is it who has been to the house?')

(19) *m   a   mi iša   lflus?*
IPN DEM to 3SG.M.SBJ.give.PFV money
'To whom did he give the money?' (lit.: 'Who is it to whom he gave the money?')

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in the first case and *ỉn(n)* in the second case. In this respect, recall that in Middle Egyptian, the subject focus marker *ỉn* precedes the interrogative *m* so frequently, particularly in sentence-initial position, that the two ultimately end up by fusing into one morpheme (cf. § 4.1.2). Note also that an assimilation from *ỉn m* to *ỉm-m* or to *ỉn-n* would result in two identical consonants next to each other and in such cases there was "a strong tendency to write them but once" (Gardiner 2001: 52). In 𓅓𓅓 (M17-G17), *ỉm(-m)*, only *m* 𓅓 (G17) would naturally be written. In 𓅓𓂻 (M17-G17-D35), *ỉn(-n)*, however, it was probably considered more important to preserve the sign 𓅓 (G17) indicating the interrogative in order to avoid possible ambiguity. In other words, here, the sign 𓂻 (D35) is a phonetic determinative specifying the reading of the previous sign. The phonetic value of the sign 𓂻 (D35) is transliterated as *n*, whereas as an ideogram or a semantic determinative it expresses the idea of negation.

10 The allomorph *a* is used when preceding an adposition. The form *agg-* results from the fusion with the following third person singular masculine verbal subject prefix *i-*.

(20) *m   ism-ənnəs?*
  IPN name-GEN.3SG
  'What's his/her name? What's it called?'

However, next to *m* Ait Ndhir Tamazight also has *-mi* 'who?, what?' used in combination with prepositions, as in (21).

Ait Ndhir Tamazight (Penchoen 1973: 82)

(21) a. *ṭaddarṭ-aḏ   ṭ-i-n-mi?*
       house.F-this F-DEM-GEN-IPN
       'Whose house is this? (lit.: 'This house is the one of who')'

  b. *s-mi?*
     with-IPN
     'with what/whom?'

  c. *xf-mi?*
     on-IPN
     'on what/whom?, about whom/what?'

  d. *yer-mi?*
     to-IPN
     'to(ward) who? (to whose place?)'

  e. *šəgg   d-mi?*
     2SG.M with-IPN
     'you and who?'

Following the principles of the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing system, forms such as Ait Ndhir Tamazight *m*, *m a* and *mi* would be represented by a single hieroglyphic writing transliterable as *m*.

  By the Middle Egyptian period, next to 𓅓 *m*, new writings of the interrogative become particularly common, such as 𓅓𓄿𓂝, 𓂝, 𓅫 and 𓅓𓄿𓂝, which Allen (2000: 54) transliterates as *mỉ*.[11] In the hieroglyphic script, the older bare

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[11] Vernus (2006: 145) mentions some rare writings that probably should be transliterated as *ỉmy* and *ỉmw*, although according to him, not all the alleged examples are certain and the exact function of these writings remains unclear. As discussed above, the initial *ỉ* is most likely to come from the subject focus marker *ỉn* (cf. footnote 10), whereas the final *y* could, in principle,

phonogram 🐦 *m* (G17) becomes extended with a so-called determinative, usually ⎯ (D38) or ⎯ (D36), sometimes ⎯ (D37). The latter three signs can hardly be semantic determinatives here because then they normally refer to the idea of giving. Apparently, in the case of the interrogative, they function as phonetic determinatives specifying the reading of another sign (group of signs). The exact sound value of the sign ⎯ (D36) is somewhat problematic because it is often used instead of other "forearm"-signs (D37–D44). The signs ⎯ (D38) and ⎯ (D37) when used as a phonogram have the value *mî* or *m*. In the case of the interrogative, their value is most likely *mî* rather than *m* and phonologically it is then /maj(V)/. The evidence for this is twofold. First, the value of the signs ⎯ (D38) and ⎯ (D37) as phonograms originates in their usage in the writings of an irregular imperative *îmî* 'give!' (Gardiner 2001: 454) and this imperative has survived in Demotic as *my* and in Coptic as ⲘⲀⲒ *mai*, often reduced to ⲘⲀ *ma* (Vycichl 1984: 103). Second, some vocalized Demotic writings of the reflexes of the combination of the interrogative *m(î)* with the preceding subject focus particle *în* (cf. §4.1.2 and below in this section), such as *nime* (Spiegelberg 1925: 19) point at an earlier reading /maj/, which in transliteration would be *mî*. The Demotic final *e* normally results in Coptic ⲉ (Lexa 1947–1951: 44), also transliterated as *e* and usually assumed to be realized as /ε/ or /ə/. It should be kept in mind that the presumed vocalization of *mî*, viz. /maj(V)/, does not necessarily tell us something about the (possible) vocalization of the older form *m*.[12] In this respect, recall the various interrogative forms and collocations used to convey the meanings 'who?' and 'what?' in Ait Ndhir Tamazight, such as *m ay* /maj/, *m a*, *m* and *mi*.

The element *î* in *mî* is likely to be related to the demonstrative root *î* mentioned by Loprieno (1996: 68).[13] Thus, the Egyptian form *mî* /maj/ could be structurally and formally similar to the Ait Ndhir Tamazight form *m ay* /maj/ 'who/what (is) it [(that)...]? ' illustrated earlier in (17). Combining interrogative pronominals with

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also be transliterated as *î* (cf. footnote 3) similarly to *mî*. The final *w* in (*î*)*mw* could come from an occasional contraction of the interrogative with the following singular masculine demonstrative (and later also a copula) *pw* (cf. §4.2.2). In this respect, note that in Old and Middle Egyptian, the phrase *m pw* 'who is it?' become lexicalized as 'someone, a certain person' (Vernus 2006: 167).

12 Although Vernus (2006: 145), referring to Albright (1926: 188), claims that at the time of the 18th dynasty, the cuneiform spelling of the interrogative *m* was *mu*, suggesting its vocalization as *mu*, the actual data presented by Albright (1926: 188) does not really warrant such interpretation. Thus, it is absolutely not obvious why the syllable *mu* in the relevant cuneiform example, viz. [*ši-na* 'two' + *aḫ* 'what?' + *mu* '?'] presumably meaning 'what is two (in Assyrian)?', should represent the interrogative in issue.

13 For possible parallels of this demonstrative root in other branches of Afro-Asiatic, see, for instance, Barth (1913: 89–91, 115–116, 129–130) for Semitic and Frajzyngier (1985: 64–66) for Chadic.

"reinforcing" deictics is quite common in other branches of Afro-Asiatic, especially in Berber, as illustrated here by Ait Ndhir Tamazight, and in Semitic (see, e.g., Barth 1913: 137–150; Brockelmann 1913: 196).

By the Late Egyptian period, as mentioned in §4.1.2, the older form *m(ỉ)* 'who?, what?' becomes largely replaced by the new form *nym* (*nỉm*) 'who?' which stems from a combination of the interrogative *m(ỉ)* with the preceding subject focus particle *ỉn* (Gardiner 2001: §496; Edel 1964: 515; Till 1986: 102). The use of the Coptic Egyptian interrogative *nim* 'who?' is illustrated in (22) and (23).

Coptic Egyptian

(22) *p-šēre   ń-nim?*
DEF.ART.M.SG-son of-who
'Whose son?' (Lambdin 1983: 19; Till 1986: 102)

(23) *nim   pe   pei-rōme?*
who   M.SG.COP M.SG.this-man
'Who is this man?' (Lambdin 1983: 19)

The development from the general 'who?, what?' interrogative *m* to the human 'who?' interrogative *nim* can be readily accounted for by some of the morphosyntactic peculiarities of *m*, the general patterns of the organization of information structure in Egyptian and the steering role of frequency effects. The morphosyntactic peculiarities of *m* that I have in mind refer to the fact that, morphosyntactically, *m* behaves rather like a "dependent" pronoun[14] in that it "is used mostly after other words" (Allen 2000: 54), such as a preposition (24), a genitive marker *n* 'of' (25), a verbal form (5a), or a subject focus marker *ỉn* (10–11). It very rarely begins a sentence on its own, as in (5b).

Middle Egyptian

(24) a. *m-m?*
with-IPN
'with what?' (Gardiner 2001: §496)

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14 In Egyptology, the term *dependent pronouns* refers to a class of pronominal elements that "are less closely attached to a preceding word than the suffix-pronouns, but can never stand as first word of a sentence" (Gardiner 2001: §43).

b. *r-m*?
   to-IPN
   'to what purpose?, what for?' (Gardiner 2001: §496)

(25) *ḫpr-n   mḏw m sꜣwy   r(ꜣ) mḏw   n   m?*
     become.PFV.(M)-of ten as two-thirds one tenth of IPN
     'Of what is ten the 23/30 part? (lit.: 'Ten has become as two-thirds (and) one-tenth of what?')' (Gardiner 2001: §495; Callender 1975: 98)

To this we can add that Egyptian constituent questions are regularly built up as focalization constructions, which can be construed as clefts (cf. Callender 1975: 96, 98; Loprieno 1996: 121). Taken together with the morphosyntactically dependent nature of *m*, this need for focalization accounts for the frequency of the combination of *m* with the subject focus marker *ꞽn*. In turn, the frequency of this combination accounts for the fact that by the Late Egyptian period it fuses into a monomorphemic interrogative pronominal *nym* (*nꞽm*) (cf. §4.1.2). That *nym* (*nꞽm*) becomes confined to the meaning 'who?' as compared to the earlier broader use of *m* as 'who?, what?' can be related to the fact that *ꞽn* is a subject focus marker. Furthermore, at least in declarative sentences, according to Callender (1975: 92), *ꞽn* tends to mark subject focus only with specific (definite?) subjects. Subjects tend to encode referents higher on the animacy hierarchy. Similarly, higher referentiality correlates with higher animacy. Finally, a certain role in the narrowing of the semantics of *nym* (*nꞽm*) to 'who?' should probably be attributed to the competition with the specialized 'what?' interrogatives *ꞽḫ* and *ꞽš-st*.

4.2.2 *pw* 'who?, what?' and related forms

As mentioned in §4.1.1, although the interrogative *pw* is not attested in Old Egyptian texts (Edel 1955: 90) and is very rare in Middle Egyptian (Gardiner 2001: §498), it is believed to be old (Edel 1955: 90). At the same time, this interrogative root is quite common in combination with a particle *tr/ ty/ tꞽ/ t* 'actually, forsooth, I wonder', as in (6b) *pw-tr/ pw-tꞽ/ ptr/ pty/ pt*.

The older form *pw* appears to be primarily used as 'who?', as in (26). Thus, Edel (1964: 518) glosses it only as 'who?'. Gardiner (2001: §498) glosses *pw* as both 'who?' and 'what?', without providing clear examples of its use as 'what?', however.

Old Egyptian

(26) *pw*   *sw*   *(ỉ)ꜥ̱ḳ(ỉ)?*
    IPN 3SG.M.DEP enter.IPFV.(M)
    'Who is he who enters?' (Edel 1964: 518; Gardiner 2001: §498)[15]

The later combinations of this root with a particle *tr*/ *ty*/ *tỉ*/ *t* 'actually, forsooth, I wonder', viz. *pw-tr*/ *pw-tỉ*/ *ptr*/ *pty*/ *pt*, seem to be somewhat more commonly used as 'what?' (27–28) rather than 'who?' (29–30). By the Late Egyptian period, the *pw*-based interrogatives appear to completely lose the ability to have the human meaning 'who?'.

Middle Egyptian

(27) *p-ty*   *h33-t*   *r-f*   *m* *sšr?*
    IPN-actually descend.IPFV.REL-F to-3SG.M.SUF as corn
    'What amount of corn can go into it?' (lit.: 'What is that which descends into it in corn?') (Gardiner 2001: §497; Callender 1975: 97)

(28) *p-ty*   *n-3?*
    IPN-actually N-DEM
    'What is this/that?' (Gardiner 2001: §111; Allen 2000: 52)

(29) *p-ty*   *sy*   *t-3*   *Rdḏdt?*
    IPN-actually 3SG.F.DEP F.SG-DEM PROP
    '[A:] Who is this Reddjedet? [B: She is the wife of a priest of Ra (name of a god), lord of Sakhebu, who is pregnant of three children belonging to Ra, lord of Sakhebu.]' (Gardiner 2001: exercise XXXIII)

(30) *p-tr*   *rf*   *sw?*
    IPN-actually FOC 3SG.M.DEP
    'Who is he?' (Gardiner 2001: §497) or 'Who is he?, What is it?' (Callender 1975: 97)

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15 The initial and the final *ỉ*'s in the verb are put in brackets because they are not represented in the hieroglyphic writing that Edel gives for this example. That two *ỉ*'s should not be present has been confirmed to me by Jean Winand (p.c.), who further comments that in some variants of the text where this example comes from the interrogative is written without the final *w*, as if it were cliticized.

Unlike the interrogatives *m* 'who?, what?' and *îḥ* 'what?', the interrogatives *pw*, *ptr* and the like always function as predicates (often of clefts) and never as objects, nor can they be headed by a preposition.

As outlined above, in the course of time the *pw*-based 'who?, what?' interrogatives appear to have shifted from primarily 'who?' to primarily 'what?'. To a large extent, this semantic evolution is likely to be accounted for by the etymology of the interrogative root *pw* and certain shifts in the use of the masculine gender. Let us start with the etymology of the interrogative root *pw*.

According to Gardiner (2001: §497), the interrogative *pw* stems from the demonstrative *p-w* 'M.SG-DEM'. This etymology is quite plausible as it is corroborated by an apparently similar evolution that can be posited for several Northern Berber languages having the interrogative *wi(n)* 'who?', such as Kabyle Berber and Figuig *w-i* 'the one who, whoever (M.SG-INDF); who?' (Lionel Galand, p.c.; Kossmann 1997: 201) (31) or Tamezret *w-in* 'the one who, whoever (M.SG-INDF); who?' (Ben Mamou 2005: 8, 12).

Figuig (Northern Berber; Morocco; Kossmann 1997: 201)

(31) a. *w-i*   *xef-sent*   *i-jawb-en*
     M.SG-INDF   on-3SG.F   PTCP-answer.PFV-PTCP
     ad *y-awey*   *yelli-s*
     FUT 3SG.M.SBJ-bring.AOR   daughter-GEN.3SG
     'The one who (whoever) will answer will marry his daughter'

   b. *wi*   *ked*   *t-uṛaṛ-ed*
     who   with   2SG.SBJ-play.PFV-2SG.SBJ
     'With whom did you play?'

These *wi(n)* interrogatives can be compared to similar pronominal forms based on the root *-i* in other Northern and Southern Berber languages, such as Ait Seghrouchen *win* 'that one (M.SG)' (Northern Berber; Bentolila 1981: 53, 93) and Malian Tuareg *win* 'those ones (M.PL)' (<*w-i-en 'M-DEM.PL-DISTANT') (Southern Berber; Heath 2005: 239–240). It is not uncommon for the forms based on the root *-i* to have non-specific or free-choice readings, as Chaouia *w-i* 'any one of these (M-DEM)' opposed to *w-a* 'exactly this (M-DEM)' (Northern Berber; Aikhenvald & Militarev 1991: 217). Often, they are then used to introduce non-specific or free-choice headless relative clauses and can be glossed as 'the one(s) who, whoever [does P]', as in (31a) or (32).

Malian Tuareg (Southern Berber; Heath 2005: 639)

(32) a. *i-də́d   osǽ-nen*
       [M]DEM-VEN go.RES-PTCP.PL
       'those (M) who (= whoever) have come'

   b. *t-i-də́d   t-osæ-t*
       F-DEM-VEN   PTCP.F.SG-go.PFV.POSITIVE-PTCP.F.SG
       'that one (F) who (= whoever) comes'

Sometimes, they can be rather interpreted as copulas 'be one that is [X]', as in (33).

Air Tuareg (Southern Berber; Galand 2002: 123)

(33) a. *ehəre-nin   i   yəggen*
       herd(M)-GEN.1SG   [M]DEM PTCP.M.SG.be.numerous.PTCP.M.SG
       'My herd is numerous (lit.: 'My herd is one that is numerous')'

   b. *tatte   t-i   n   kullu-nnəwən*
       food(F) F-DEM   GEN   each-GEN.2PL
       'The food is of you all (lit.: 'The food is one of each of yours')'

Typically, the Berber forms based on the root *-i* are either plural, as Malian Tuareg *win* 'those ones (M.PL)', or neutral with respect to number, as in (32–33) above and (34).

Ait Ndhir Tamazight (Northern Berber; Penchoen 1973: 23)

(34) a. *w-i-nnəs*
       M-DEM-GEN.3SG
       'his/her masculine-one(s)'

   b. *w-i-s-sin*
       M-DEM-with-two.M
       'the second masculine-one(s)'

The evolution from a demonstrative to an interrogative could have started with the use of the demonstrative as introducer of (non-specific, free-choice) headless relative clauses, as in (31–32) above, and proceeded through conventionalization

of stand-alone uses of such headless relative clauses accompanied by an interrogative intonation. That is, the development may have been 'The one who is the thief (is)?...' → 'Who is the thief?'. To a certain extent, this development would be analogous to the one proposed in §4.1.1 for the Egyptian interrogative *ỉš-st* 'what?', viz. 'It (she) is the thing [(that)...]?' → 'what is it (she) [(that)...]?' → 'what?'.

Interestingly, the Egyptian demonstrative *p-w* 'M.SG-DEM' shows some further parallels to the Berber forms based on the root *-i*. Thus, *pw* in Egyptian has also developed copula-like uses similar to (33). Already during the Old Egyptian period ("long before the Middle Kingdom", Gardiner 2001: §130) *p-w* 'M.SG-DEM' came to be used first as "logical subject after logical predicates consisting of a noun [...] as an equivalent for 'he', 'she', 'it' or 'they' invariable in number and gender", as in (35) and (36), and subsequently as a copula linking two nominals, as in (37)[16] (Gardiner 2001: §§128–130).

Middle Egyptian

(35) *Rʕ   pw*
    PROP DEM
    '[A: Who is he? B:] It/He/This is Ra (name of a god)' (Gardiner 2001: §128)

(36) *ḥmt   wʕb   pw   n   Rʕ*
    wife(F) priest DEM of PROP
    '[A: Who is this Reddjedet?, B:] She is the wife of a priest of Ra (name of a god)' (Gardiner 2001: §128)

(37) *dmỉ   pw   ỉmnt*
    abode COP west
    'The West is an abode' (Gardiner 2001: §130)

Somewhat similarly to the Berber use of the forms based on the root *-i* as introducers of non-specific or free-choice headless relative clauses, in Egyptian *pw* can be used to form a pseudocleft with a non-specific (or indefinite?) nominal as the predicate, as in (38), where *pw* can be analyzed as a copula or as a relative pronominal (cf. Callender 1975: 92; Loprieno 1996: 104).

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16 Eitan Grossman (p.c.) suggests that (37) should rather be analyzed as antitopic construction with *pw* being a "pronominal subject".

Middle Egyptian

(38) *rmṯ   pw   ḫzy-n-f?*
man   COP/REL   praise.PFV.(M)-of-3SG.M.SUF
'The one whom he praised is a man' (Loprieno 1996: 104), or as Callender (1975) would translate it, 'It was a man whom he praised'

If we omit here the initial non-specific nominal and add an interrogative intonation, we get a stand-alone (non-specific, free-choice) headless relative clause used as a question, viz. 'The one whom he praised (is)?...', which would be the same construction as was suggested above as the intermediate stage on the development from a demonstrative to an interrogative pronominal in Berber. This hypothesis allows us to account straightforwardly for the aforementioned fact that unlike the interrogatives *m* 'who?, what?' and *îḫ* 'what?', the interrogatives *pw*, *ptr* and the like always function as predicates (often of clefts) and never as objects, nor can they be headed by a preposition.

The primacy of the human meaning 'who?' in the semantics of the Egyptian *pw*-based interrogatives on the earlier stages is reminiscent of the human meaning 'who?' of the *wi(n)* interrogatives in Northern Berber, which similarly appear to stem from a masculine demonstrative pronominal. For Egyptian, the primacy of 'who?' in the semantics of the Egyptian *pw*-based interrogatives on the earlier stages correlates with the fact that in Old Egyptian and to an important extent in Middle Egyptian "the sense of the English neuter ('it', 'thing')" is preferably expressed by the feminine whereas by the Late Egyptian period this function is taken over by the masculine (Gardiner 2001: §51, §511). That is, in Old and Middle Egyptian, the feminine is the default non-human gender, whereas the masculine is the default human gender. Such a situation is not uncommon in Afro-Asiatic.[17]

The later shift in the semantics of the Egyptian *pw*-based 'who?, what?' interrogatives in favor of 'what?' largely precedes the generalization of the masculine as the general default gender (both human and non-human). Therefore, the stimulus behind the shift in the semantics of the interrogative should be sought elsewhere. Thus, I believe that the evolution of the interrogative is largely due to another more specific change related to the use of the masculine. The change I have in mind is the gender-number neutralization of the demonstrative *p-w*

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17 For instance, Diakonoff (1965: 53) reports that the feminine (overtly) marked by the affix *t-* is commonly used in Afro-Asiatic languages for abstract notions and "socially inactive" entities (cf. also Achab 2005: 102–103 on Berber).

'M.SG-DEM' when, as already mentioned in this section, it came to be used first as "logical subject after logical predicates consisting of a noun […] as an equivalent for 'he', 'she', 'it' or 'they' invariable in number and gender", as in (35) and (36), and subsequently as a copula linking two nominals, as in (37) (Gardiner 2001: §§128–130). First, as this change was going on already during the Old Egyptian period ("long before the Middle Kingdom", Gardiner 2001: §130), it better corresponds in its timing to the shift in the semantics of the interrogative. Second, it affects precisely the demonstrative *p-w* 'M.SG-DEM', the presumed etymological source of the interrogative. Thus, we get an additional piece of evidence in favor of the demonstrative etymology of the interrogative, which also correlates with the exclusively predicative use of the *pw*-based interrogatives and fits the path for the development of the interrogative proposed above. It is worth mentioning here that if the semantic evolution of the interrogative was influenced by the aforementioned gender-number neutralization of the demonstrative *p-w* 'M.SG-DEM', this would imply that the development of the interrogative out of the demonstrative was still ongoing when this neutralization was introduced in the language.

By the Late Egyptian period, the *pw*-based interrogatives (i) appear to completely lose the ability to have the human meaning 'who?' and (ii) become so rare[18] that they are probably best viewed as remnants of the Middle Egyptian stage. This is likely to be due to the competition with the other, semantically more specialized interrogatives, viz. (i) the specialized human interrogative 'who?', *(ỉ)n m*, that emerged during the Middle Egyptian period and eventually resulted in the Late Egyptian *nym* (*nỉm*) 'who?' (cf. §4.1.1), and (ii) the specialized non-human interrogatives 'what?', *ỉš-st* and *ỉḫ*.

4.2.3 The 'who?, what?' use of *zy* (and the like)

As indicated in (6e), the interrogative *zy* is transliterated in a variety of ways in the sources, viz. *zy*, *zỉ*, *sy*, *sỉ*, *z* and *s*. However, these differences do not reflect any difference in the semantics or use of this interrogative and will therefore be ignored here.[19]

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18 Thus, only one source, Lesko & Lesko (2004: 159), mentions the interrogative *ptr* for Late Egyptian. In this respect, Eitan Grossman (p.c.) points out that Lesko & Lesko (2004) is not a very reliable source and that the presumed Late Egyptian form *ptr* is more likely to be the presentative 'look, lo, behold', which evolved from the verb *ptr* 'look'.

19 I prefer the transliteration *zy* as the representative form of this interrogative for the following reasons. The variation between *z* and *s* in the transliterations is due to the fact that the original Old Egyptian distinction between *z* and *s* (phonologically, probably /θ/ vs. /s/, cf. Allen 2000: 16)

The interrogative *zy* is particularly common in attributive use as 'which [N]?, what (kind of) [N]?' (person or thing), as in (39).

Middle Egyptian

(39) *zy wȝt?*
IPN path
'which path?' (Allen 2000: 55), '[on] what road?' (Gardiner 2001: §499)

Given this common attributive usage, there are good chances that the final *-y* of *zy* is the same *-y* as the adjectivizing suffix *-y* (cf. Gardiner 2001: §79). However, unlike the adjectives in *-y*, *zy* only very sporadically agrees in gender-number with the noun it modifies (cf. Vernus 2006: 146 contra Gardiner 2001: §499).

In Old and Middle Egyptian, the interrogative *zy* also occasionally appears predicatively as 'who?' (40–41) and 'what?' (42–43) (cf. Edel 1955: 90, 1964: 518; Gardiner 2001: §499). In some cases, *zy* can also be interpreted selectively as 'which one?' (40). Finally, Vernus (2006: 151) also provides an example of *zy* with a preposition, viz. *r zy* '[you are] to what? (i.e. 'in what direction')'.

Old Egyptian

(40) *zî pw   (î)ḏd(î)   îrî-f   m   tr?*
IPN COP/REL say.IPFV.(M) do.PFV.(M)-3SG.M.SUF in time
'Which one/Who can/would say that he can do it on time?' (Edel's 1964: 518 German translation is 'Wer ist einer, der sagen (kann), dass er es zur (rechten) Zeit schafft?')

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disappeared by Middle Egyptian so that only *s* has remained, but because Egyptian orthography was rather conservative, the distinction was often still preserved in writing. As a rule, hieroglyphic writings of this interrogative use the signs ▬ (O34, the so-called "bolt") or 𐤷 (O35, from a combination of O34 with "walking legs" sign D54). The original phonogram value of both signs is *z*. Therefore, transliterations with *z* reflect an older reading, whereas transliterations with *s* reflect a later merger of *z* with *s*. Furthermore, this interrogative was only very rarely written with a phonogram ∫ *s* (S29) in Middle Egyptian (Gardiner 2001: §499). The variation between *y* and *î* in the transliterations of this interrogative appears to be a matter of interpretation, for it does not reflect any difference in hieroglyphic form. In both cases, the writing is either 𓏭 (double M17) or ⦀ (Z4). I opt for *y* because in Middle Egyptian the two writings normally have the same transliteration value *y* (Gardiner 2001: §20, 481, 536–537).

Middle Egyptian

(41) *ntk*   *sy?*
    2SG.M.INDEP IPN
    'Who are you?' (Gardiner 2001: §499)

(42) *sy*   *pw* *mỉ-w* *p-w*   *ꜥꜣ?*
    IPN COP cat-M M-DEM great
    'What is that great cat?' (Depuydt's 1999: 238 translation is 'Who is that great cat?')

(43) *sy*   *ty*   *pw*   *ꜥt-y*   *ỉpt-f?*
    IPN actually COP limb-DU DEM.F.PL-3SG.M.SUF
    'What are those two limbs?' (Gardiner 2001: §499)

The lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' with the predicatively used *zy* has its straightforward explanation in the attributive origins of this interrogative where it does not differentiate between humans and non-humans either.[20]

By the Late Egyptian period, the interrogative *zy* disappears from the language.

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20 The interrogative *zy* can be compared to the French interrogative *quel* 'which [N]?, what (kind of) [N]?', which is usually used attributively, as in *quel arbre/homme*? 'which tree/man?, what (kind of) tree/man?', but also allows for predicative use as either 'what?' or 'who?' (cf. Riegel et al. 2001: 395; Idiatov 2007: 247–249).

5 Egyptian non-selective interrogative pronominals: functional differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?'

The issue of functional differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' concerns only the interrogatives that are specialized in one of the two meanings, such as *iḫ* 'what?' and *nim* 'who?'.[21] It should be mentioned that my data on the functional differentiation is rather fragmentary and more examples are needed. This is especially true for Old and Middle Egyptian. For these two earliest stages, the relevant examples (i.e., examples involving KIND-questions, NAME-questions or ANIMATE-questions as defined in §3) that I have, involve only the interrogatives that can be used as both 'who?' and 'what?' such as *m* and *pw*-based interrogatives. This means that, strictly speaking, for the time being, it is not possible to describe Old and Middle Egyptian in terms of the typology of functional differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?' presented in §3 and Table 1. However, we could also interpret the lack of relevant examples with the specialized non-human interrogatives 'what?', *iš-st* and *iḫ*, as an indication that the latter interrogatives were not possible in such questions. If we allow for such an interpretation, in terms of the typology of functional differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?' Old and Middle Egyptian would represent type 1 (cf. §3), which implies the use of 'who?' in KIND-questions and in NAME-questions.

Late and Coptic Egyptian with their clear formal differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' provide a much more rewarding domain for a study of the functional differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?'.[22] Thus, in terms of the typology presented in §3 and Table 1, Late and Coptic Egyptian represent type 3 characterized by TYPE OF REFERENCE prominence. That is, they allow for the use of 'what?' in KIND-questions, as in (44–45), and 'who?' in NAME-questions, as in (46–47).

Late Egyptian

(44) *iḫ   ḥr ib-k   n-n   n   ʕȝm.w?*
     what to heart-2SG.M.SUF N-DEM of Asian-M.PL
     'What are these Asians for you?' (Erman 1968: 374)

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21 This restriction is not as obvious as it may seem and is justified in the case of Egyptian only by the fact that it is a dead language for which it is impossible to get the relevant negative evidence from the native speakers. In this respect, cf. Idiatov (2009) on the use of the Mongo (Niger-Congo, Bantu C.61; DR Congo) interrogative *ná* 'who?, what?' in NAME-questions.

22 I do not consider Demotic Egyptian here due to the lack of relevant data.

Coptic Egyptian

(45) * n̄tk̲*   *ou-ou?*
    2SG.M   INDF.ART.M.SG-what
    'What are you?' (Lambdin 1983: 19; Till 1986: 102)

Late Egyptian

(46) *nym* *rn*   *n*   *pꜣyỉ̂ỉt?*
    who   name   of   my   father
    'What is the name of my father?' (Erman [1933] 1968: 376)[23]

Coptic Egyptian

(47) *nim* *pe*   *pe-k-ran?*
    who   COP   M.SG-2SG.M.POSS-name
    'What is your name?' (Lambdin 1983: 19; Till 1986: 102)

6 Conclusion: Egyptian non-selective interrogative pronominals from the Afro-Asiatic perspective

By way of conclusion, let us consider the data from the different periods of the Egyptian language discussed in §§4 and 5 within the larger context of the Afro-Asiatic phylum of which Egyptian is generally held to form a separate branch.

As discussed in §4, the older stages of the Egyptian language, Old and Middle Egyptian, have several NIPs that are attested as both 'who?' and 'what?', viz. *m, pw* and *zy,* and two mutually related specialized non-human interrogatives 'what?', viz. *ỉš-st* and *ỉḫ*. By the Late Egyptian period, 'who?' and 'what?' become fully differentiated and this formal differentiation is maintained on all the subsequent stages. Furthermore, Old and Middle Egyptian have a bigger inventory of NIPs, many of them with largely overlapping semantics, as compared to the later stages. In both of these features, viz. a lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' and a large inventory of NIPs, Old and Middle Egyptian remarkably resemble Berber languages, especially Northern and Western Berber (cf. Idiatov

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23 Transliteration of this example is mine because Erman gives only the hieroglyphic form.

2007: 155–180). By contrast, lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' is only sporadically attested in Semitic and Cushitic[24] and seems to be absent in Chadic. In all these groups, 'who?' and 'what?' are typically lexicalized as separate roots and the inventories of NIPs tend to be rather restricted, which is also characteristic of the later stages of the Egyptian language, viz. Late, Demotic and Coptic Egyptian.

As far as functional differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' is concerned, as discussed in §5, it is difficult to characterize Old and Middle Egyptian in terms of the typology presented in §3. Late and Coptic Egyptian represent type 3, as they allow for the use of 'what?' in KIND-questions and 'who?' in NAME-questions (cf. §5). In this use of their NIPs, they resemble many Semitic and Cushitic languages rather than Berber. Examples (48–49a) with 'what?' in KIND-questions and (50–51) with 'who?' in NAME-questions illustrate this for Semitic.

Old Babylonian (East Semitic; Iraq; ca. 2000–1500 BC)

(48) *mann-um   šum-ka?*
    who-NOM   name-2SG.M
    'What is your name?' (Izre'el & Cohen 2004: 111)

Biblical Hebrew (West Semitic, Central; Israel; ca. the first millennium BC)

(49) a. *mi(y) šə̄mɛ-χɔ?*
      who   name-2SG.M
      'What is your name?' (Judges 13: 17 via Brockelmann 1913: 195; David Kummerow, p.c.)

    b. *ma-ššə̄mɛ-χɔ?*
      what-name-2SG.M
      'What is your name?' (Genesis 32: 27 via Brockelmann 1913: 195)

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24 The only uncontroversial examples of a lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' in these branches are the Southern Mesopotamian Arabic interrogative *man* for Semitic (cf. Ingham 1973, 1982) and the Saho (except for the Asa-Awurta and Tarua dialects) interrogative *ay* (cf. Reinisch 1890) for Cushitic.

Classical Arabic (West Semitic, Central)

(50) *fa-ma:*   *tazawwaj-ta*   *bikr-a-n*   *ʔaw*
so-what   marry.PRF-2SG.M   virgin-ACC.SG-INDF   or
tayyib-a-n?
deflowered-ACC.SG-INDEF
'What (woman) have you married, a virgin or an already deflowered one?' (Brockelmann 1913: 195)

Shehri (West Semitic, South; Oman)

(51) *emé-k*   *b-íné*   *zḥoñt?*
mother-2SG.M   with-what   come.PRF.3SG.F.SBJ
'[And he asked him,] What has your mother given birth to? [The guy said to him, 'She has given birth to a girl...']' (Bittner 1917: 74–75)

On the whole, when both the formal and functional differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?' are considered, the NIP system of Egyptian appears to have evolved from a more Berber-like situation in Old and Middle Egyptian to a more Semitic/Cushitic-like situation in Late, Demotic and Coptic Egyptian. It is interesting that chronologically this shift seems to correlate with the growing interaction of Egyptians with Semitic peoples. Thus, the Second Intermediate Period, ca. 18th–16th centuries BC, during which the transition from Middle Egyptian to Late Egyptian mostly occurred (or at least, is clearly manifested in the texts for the first time), is also the period when the Semitic dynasties, the so-called Hyksos, rule over Egypt. The end of the Middle Kingdom which immediately preceded the Second Intermediate Period is also known for numerous Egyptian incursions in Asia and for Asian settlers being brought to work in Egypt. Last but not least, recall in this respect that Late Egyptian is also believed to have an interrogative of Semitic origin, viz. *ỉṯ(ỉ)* 'where?, which [N]?, which one?, who?' (cf. §4.1.2).

Abbreviations and glossing conventions:

ACC	accusative
ACT	active
AG	agreement pattern
AOR	aorist
ART	article
COP	copula
DEF	definite
DEM	demonstrative
DEP	"dependent pronouns"
DU	dual
F	feminine
FOC	focus
FUT	future
G	gender
GEN	genitive
IND	indicative
INDEP	"independent pronouns"
INDF	indefinite
IPFV	imperfective
IPN	interrogative pronominal
M	masculine
N	neuter
NIP	non-selective interrogative pronominal
NOM	nominative
NON‹…›	non-‹…›
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRF	perfect
PROP	proper name
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCP	participle
REL	relative
RES	resultative
SBJ	subject
SG	singular
SUF	"suffixed pronouns"
VEN	ventive ("centripetal")

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