

Egyptian non-selective interrogative pronominals: history and typology

Dmitry Idiatov
University of Antwerp
Center for Grammar, Cognition and Typology

Dmitry.Idiatov@ua.ac.be



Non-selective interrogative pronominals (NIPs): 'who?' & 'what?'

- (1) a. *Who* is that man over there?
b. *Who* gave you this?
- (2) a. *What* is this thing you have in your hand?
b. *What* fell out of his bag?

2

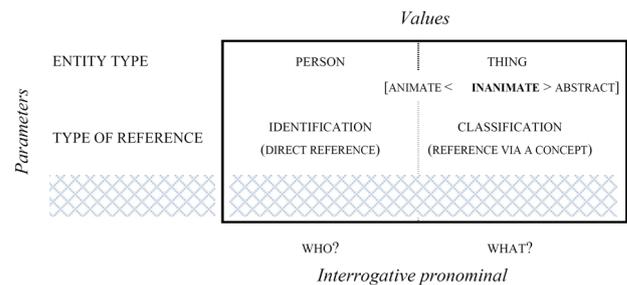
NIPs: from a typological perspective

For purposes of cross-linguistic comparison, NIPs, 'who?' and 'what?', are best defined through their functions in terms of **prototypical combinations of values** (cf. Idiatov 2007).

3

NIPs: from a typological perspective

Figure 1. Conceptual space for delimiting the prototypical functions of non-selective interrogative pronominals



4

- [person + classification + common noun] (**KIND-questions**)

English

- (3) *What* is he actually? A doctor?

Russian

- (4) *A on kto voobsche? Vrach?*
and he *who* actually doctor
'*What* is he actually? A doctor?'

5

- [thing + identification + proper name] (**NAME-questions**)

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

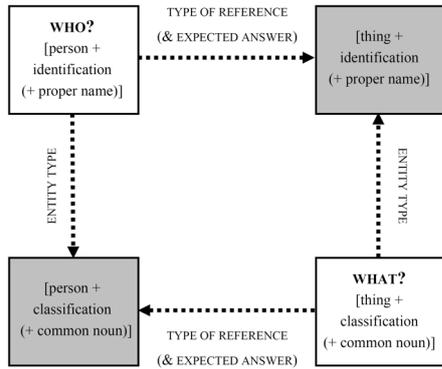
- (5) [A:] *libizho la lehelo lo ke anye?*
name of place this is *who*

[B:] *ke Huhunsi*
is Hukuntsi

'[A:] *What* (lit.: '*who?*') is the name of this place? [B:] It's Hukuntsi (a village name)'

6

Figure 2. Conceptual space for non-selective interrogative pronominals (in terms of prototypical and non-prototypical combinations of values and 'who?'/ 'what?'-dominance)



Some complications:

- a language may choose a different strategy in different contexts even when the combinations of values in these contexts are the same
- many languages treat non-human living beings similarly to humans in various respects and some also use 'who?' in questions about them (ANIMATE-questions)

Russian

(6) *Kto eto tebja ukusil? Osa?*
who this you bit wasp
 '[Looking at a swelling on someone's hand clearly caused by an insect bite:] **What** stung you? A wasp?'

'Who?'/ 'what?'-dominance in cases of non-prototypical combinations of values: a typology

Table 1. The primary (four-way) typology of 'who?'/ 'what?'-dominance in cases of non-prototypical combinations of values

	KIND-questions [person + classification (+ common noun)]	NAME-questions [thing + identification (+ proper name)]	Prominence
1	'who?'	'who?'	'who?'
2	'who?'	'what?'	ENTITY TYPE
3	'what?'	'who?'	TYPE OF REFERENCE
4	'what?'	'what?'	'what?'

'Who?'/ 'what?'-dominance in cases of non-prototypical combinations of values: a typology

Table 2. The full typology of 'who?'/ 'what?'-dominance in cases of non-prototypical combinations of values

	KIND-questions	NAME-questions	ANIMATE-questions	Prominence
1 ^a	'who?'	'who?'	'who?'	'who?'
1 ^b			('what?')	
2 ^a	'who?'	'what?'	'who?'	ENTITY TYPE
2 ^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)

'Who?'/ 'what?'-dominance in cases of non-prototypical combinations of values: a typology

Table 3. The distribution of the languages of the reduced sample in terms of the full typology of 'who?'/ 'what?'-dominance in cases of non-prototypical combinations of values

Type	Number	% of total (192)	Languages (examples; cf. also Appendix D)
1 ^a	5	3%	Barasana (Tucanoan), Swahili (Bantu), Trió (Carib)
1 ^b	20	10%	Alawa (Maran), Candoshi (Isolate), Gweetaawu Dan (Eastern Mande)
2 ^a	1	1%	Russian (Slavic)
2 ^b	29	15%	Budukh (Lezgie), Daba (Chadic), Chickasaw (Muskogean)
3	42	22%	Eton (Bantu), Kaxarari (Panoan), Savosavo (East Papuan)
4	93	48%	Arabela (Zaparoan), Bisa (Eastern Mande), English (Germanic)
5	1	1%	Kathmandu Newar (Bodic)
6	1	1%	Avam Nganasan (Samoyedic)

Lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?'

- one form for both [person + identification + proper name] & [thing + classification + common noun]

Lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?'

Poitevin French (Mineau 1982:255 via Rottet 2004:173)

- (7) a. *Qui qu'est venu?*
who that-is come
 'Who came?'
- b. *Qui qu'tu manges?*
what that-you eat
 'What are you eating?'

13

Lack of differentiation

- Differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' is not universal and although on a world-wide scale, lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' is not common, it is far from being as marginal as is often assumed.

131 (more) certain cases + 37 less certain cases

14

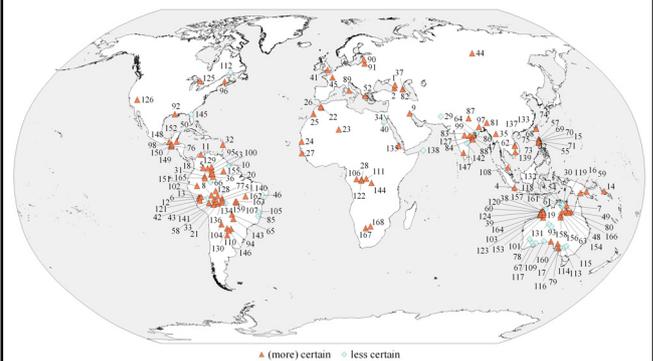
Lack of differentiation

- Languages allowing for a lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' can be found all around the world. However, the distribution is rather uneven, which points to areal influences and above all, genetic predispositions.

- Australia & South America
- New Guinea & North America

15

Map 1. The distribution of the languages that (may) allow a lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?'



16

Lack of differentiation

- Languages may both lose differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' and acquire it.

17

Lack of differentiation

- 'where?' > 'which one?' > 'who?, what?'
- 'which one?', 'which/what [N]?' > 'who?, what?'
- [single interrogative root + gender-number marking] + peculiarities of the gender-number system > 'who?, what?'
- constructions based on a noun meaning 'name' or verbs meaning 'do, say, be', 'name', 'call' > 'who?, what?'
- ? filler (placeholder) meaning 'whatsi(t)sname' > 'who?, what?'
- ? language contact

18

Typology of NIPs: two parameters of variation

- formal differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?' or lack thereof
- functional differentiation of 'who?' and 'what?' in languages where they are distinguished formally

19

Egyptian NIPs

20

Questions:

- **#1:** How do Egyptian NIPs behave with respect to the typology outlined above throughout the recorded history of the Egyptian language?
- **#2:** How can we 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?
- **#3:** How do Egyptian data relate to the data from the other branches of the Afro-Asiatic phylum?

21

A caveat:

- The pre-Coptic Egyptian writing systems
- E.g., is *m* 'who?, what?' one interrogative or two with different vocalizations corresponding to different meanings?..

22

- ...however, the probability of the latter situation seems to be rather low
- A given NIP is always rendered with the same sign(s) whether it means 'who?' or 'what?'.
- At the very least, any difference possibly expressed by vowels was not lexical, 'who?' vs. 'what?', but grammatical of some kind, e.g., difference in case, the so-called "state", focus, etc.
- Agreement patterns do not depend on whether the meaning of *m* is 'who?' or 'what?'.
- More than one unrelated 'who?, what?' interrogatives are recorded.
- Comparative Semitic, and especially, Berber evidence.

23

Egyptian NIPs & formal differentiation between 'who?' & 'what?'

- *m* 'who?, what?' (**m*/ and/or **mi* ~ *ma*/)
- *pw*, *pw-tr* (and the like) 'who?, what?' (from *p-w* M.SG-DEM Gardiner 2001:406)
- *zy* 'which [N]?, what kind of [N]?' but in predicative use also as 'who?, what?'

24

m 'who?, what?'

Old Egyptian

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

m 'who?, what?'

Middle Egyptian

- (1) a. *twt m tr?*
2SG.M.INDEP IPW actually
'Who are you then?' (Loprieno 1996:121), 'Who pray art thou?'
Gardiner 2001:405 [1957])
- b. *m tr tw?*
IPW actually 2SG.M.DEP
'Who pray art thou?' (Gardiner 2001:405 [1957])
- (2) *in m dd sw?*
SBJ.FOC IPW say.IPFV.(M) 3SG.M.DEP
'[A:] What expresses it? [B: Twenty expresses it].' (Gardiner 2001:405 [1957], Callender 1975:97)

pw, pw-tr, pw-ti (and the like) 'who?, what?'

Old Egyptian

- (1) *pw sw (i)k(i)?*
IPW 3SG.M.DEP enter.IPFV.(M)
'Who is he who enters?' (Edel 1964:518, Gardiner 2001:407 [1957])

Middle Egyptian

- (2) *p-tr rf sw?*
IPW-actually then 3SG.M.DEP
'Who is he?' (Gardiner 2001:406 [1957]) or 'Who is he?, What is it?'
(Callender 1975:97)
- (3) *p-ty n-3?*
IPW-actually N-DEM
'What is this/that?' (Gardiner 2001:86 [1957], Allen 2000:52)

sy (sy and the like) 'which?', (predicatively) 'who?, what?'

Middle Egyptian

- (1) *ntk sy?*
2SG.M.INDEP IPW
'Who are you?' (Gardiner 2001:407 [1957])
- (2) *sy ty pw t-y ipt-f?*
IPW actually COP limb-DU DEM.F.PL-3SG.M.SUF
'What are those two limbs?' (Gardiner 2001:407 [1957])

Forms & meanings of Egyptian NIPs: a historical overview

Old and Middle Egyptian interrogative pronominals (based on Allen 2000, Edel 1955, 1964, Callender 1975, Gardiner 2001 [1957], Loprieno 1996)

- a. *m, mi*  'who?, what?'
- b. *pw*  'who?, what?'
- pw-tr* 
- pw-ti* 
- p-tr* 
- p-ty (p-ti)* 
- p-t* 
- c. *is-st*  'what?' (unlikely also 'who?')
- is-sy* 
- d. *ih*  'what?'
- e. *zy (zi), sy (si)*  'which [N]?', 'what (kind of [N])?', 'which one?', 'who?', 'what?'
- z, s* 

Forms & meanings of Egyptian NIPs: a historical overview

Late Egyptian interrogative pronominals (based on Černý 1978, Erman 1968 [1933], Junge 1996, Korostovtsev 1973 and Lesko & Lesko 2002, 2004)

- a. *nym (nim)*  'who?'
- m*  'who?, what?'
- b. *ih*  'what?', maybe rarely 'who?'
- c. *it(i)*  'which [N]?', 'where?', 'which one?', 'who?'
- d. *ptr*  'what?, where?'

Forms & meanings of Egyptian NIPs: a historical overview

Demotic interrogative pronominals (based on du Bourguet 1976, Johnson 2001, Lexa 1947-1951 and Spiegelberg 1925)

- a. *nm, nim(e)* 'who?'
- b. *ih* 'what?'

31

Forms & meanings of Egyptian NIPs: a historical overview

Coptic interrogative pronominals (based on Crum 1962 [1939], Lambdin 1983, Plumley 1948, Till 1961, 1986 [1966] and Vycichl 1984)

- a. *nm* *nm* (Bohairic, Sahidic) 'who?', 'which (one)? (person or thing)'
- b. *oy* *ou* (Sahidic, Bohairic) 'what?', 'what (kind of) [N] (thing)?'
- oyo* *ouo* (Akhmimic)
- oyw* *ouō* (*Sahidic)
- oyΔ* *oua* (*Oxyrhynchite)
- o* *o* (Akhmimic, Assyutic)
- ω* *ō* (Akhmimic, *Sahidic)
- ey* *eu* (Assyutic, Sahidic)
- oyπ* *oun* (Fayyumic, *Sahidic)
- c. *Δω* *aš* (Bohairic, Sahidic) 'what (kind of) [N]?, which [N]?', 'which one (thing)?, what? (predicative)'
- εω* *eš* (Assyutic, Fayyumic)
- εϜ* *ex* (Akhmimic)
- ΔϜ* *ax* (Sahidic)

32

From *m* 'who?, what?' to *nm* 'who?'

- Morphosyntactically, *m* behaves rather like a "dependent" pronoun in that it "is used mostly after other words" (Allen 2000:54), such as a preposition or a genitive marker and, a subject focus marker *in*, a verbal form, etc.
- Subject focus marker *in* + *m* 'who?, what?' → *nm* 'who?'
- Subjects (esp. of transitive verbs) are normally high on the animacy hierarchy and frequently human
- Furthermore, according to Callender (1975:92), in declarative sentences, *in* tends to mark subject focus only with specific (definite?) subjects
- Higher referentiality correlates with higher animacy
- Competition with a specialized 'what?' NIP *ih* / *iš-st*

33

pw and *pw*-based NIPs

- The older form *pw* seems to be primarily 'who?' (Edel 1964:518), marginally probably also as 'what?' (Gardiner 2001:407)
- The later forms based on [*pw* + *tr/ty/ti/t* 'actually, forsooth, I wonder'] seem to be primarily 'what?', marginally also as 'who?'
- 'who?, what?' → 'what?, who?'
- *p-w* M.SG-DEM > NIP *pw* Gardiner (2001:406)
- In several Northern Berber languages, *w-i* M.SG-DEM > 'who?'
- (Gardiner 2001:417, 48): in Old & Middle Egyptian "the meaning of the neuter" was preferably expressed by the feminine

34

pw and *pw*-based NIPs

- "long before the Middle Kingdom" (Gardiner 2001:104) the demonstrative *pw* has developed into a copula "invariable in number and gender"
- the *pw*-based NIPs always appear to function as (nominal) predicates (usually within clefts), never as objects, nor can they be headed by a preposition
- Competition with the emerging specialized human NIP 'who?' (*inm*)

35

Egyptian NIPs & functional differentiation between 'who?' & 'what?'

- Old & Middle Egyptian seem to be of type 2(b) (ENTITY TYPE prominence):
 - 'who?' in KIND-questions
 - 'what?' in NAME-questions
 - 'what?' in ANIMATE-questions
- Late & Coptic Egyptian seem to be of type 3 (TYPE OF REFERENCE prominence):
 - 'what?' in KIND-questions
 - 'who?' in NAME-questions
 - 'what?' in ANIMATE-questions

36

Egyptian NIPs & functional differentiation between 'who?' & 'what?' (KIND-questions)

Late Egyptian

- (1) *iḥ ḥr ib-k n-n n ʿ3m.w?*
 IPW to heart-2SG.M.SUF N-DEM of Asian-M.PL
 'What are these Asians for you?' (Erman 1968:374 [1933])

Coptic Egyptian

- (2) *n̄tk ou-ou?*
 2SG.M INDF.ART.M.SG-what
 'What are you?' (Lambdin 1983:19, Till 1986:102 [1966])

37

Egyptian NIPs & functional differentiation between 'who?' & 'what?' (NAME-questions)

Late Egyptian

- (1) *nym rn n p3yi it?*
 who name of my father
 'What (lit.: 'who?') is the name of my father?' (Erman 1968:376 [1933])

Coptic

- (2) *nim pe pe-k-ran?*
 who M.SG.COP M.SG-2SG.M.POSS-name
 'What is your name?' (Lambdin 1983:19, Till 1986:102 [1966])

38

Egyptian NIPs from an Afro-Asiatic perspective

- recurrent lack of differentiation between 'who?' and 'what?' such as found in older forms of Egyptian is also quite common in Berber. It is only sporadically attested in Semitic and Cushitic and seems to be absent in Chadic where 'who?' and 'what?' are lexicalized as separate roots.
- morphosyntactically predominantly "dependent" behaviour of *m* resembles the situation in many Berber languages (e.g. Ait Ndir).
- as to functional differentiation between 'who?' & 'what?', Old & Middle Egyptian seem to be more like Berber, whereas Late Egyptian & Coptic more like Semitic in that they allow for 'who?' in NAME-questions & for 'what?' in KIND-questions.

39

Old Babylonian

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

Biblical Hebrew

- (2) a. *mi(y) šəm-χ?*
 who name-2SG.M
 'What is your name?' (Judges 13:17 via Brockelmann 1913:195, David Kummerow, p.c.)
 b. *ma-ššəm-χ?*
 what-name-2SG.M
 'What is your name?' (Genesis 32:27 via Brockelmann 1913:195)

40

Classical Arabic

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

Amharic

- (2) *John mindin nā-w?*
 PROP what COP-3SG.M
 'What is John?' (Seyoum Mulugeta, p.c.)

41

Egyptian NIPs from an Afro-Asiatic perspective

- On the whole, the NIP system of Old & Middle Egyptian appears to be more Berber-like, whereas by the Late Egyptian period a shift to a more Semitic-like system appears to have occurred.

42