On the new definition of classifier languages and scripts

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Polotsky's ideas on the substantive nature of verbal forms in Egyptian were not conceived in a vacuum. Many years of studies of Arabic, Ethiopian, and other languages in which substantival forms of the verb are an important and natural part of the grammatical system, led him to hypothesize that the key to understanding the Egyptian verb-forms is a similar nominal structure so frequent in these languages.[1]

Egyptology received his solutions with great suspicion, which has not yet entirely vanished. Nevertheless, it seems that the 'that-forms' theory would have appeared in a different light, if more Egyptologists had taken the time to look outside our own discipline, and our own script and language.

Modern Egyptology owes the term 'determinative' to Champollion,[2] who adopted the term, in turn, from Chinese.[3] In the last ten years, I have suggested in different publications that the script phenomenon Egyptologists usually refer to as 'determinatives,' is in fact a system of graphemic classifiers.[4] More recently, in another publication dedicated to Hans Jacob Polotsky, I have given a detailed resumé of the use of the Egyptian script classifiers as compared to morphemic classifiers used in different languages. All of the classifier phenomena found in the script have exact parallels in (spoken) classifier languages.[5]

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[1] Polotsky 1971.

[2] See Goldwasser 2006: 17.

[3] However, the use of the term 'determinative' in Sinology is different from its use in Egyptology. On classifiers in Chinese, see Wiebusch 1999.

[4] Goldwasser 2002. Classifier language scholars have long recognized the Egyptian system as a classifier system. See Rude 1986; recently cited by Senft 2000: 43, note 9.

[5] See Goldwasser 2006.

Nevertheless, the change in terminology from 'determinative' to 'classifier' was only very partially accepted in Egyptology. The new terminology is rarely used in publications and grammatical discussions, and it was even rejected by some scholars, who claimed that "the Egyptological distinction between so-called 'phonetic signs' and so-called 'lexical classifiers' or simply 'determinatives', was not a feature of the Egyptian's assumptions about their own graphic system; rather the Egyptological opposition between 'phonetic signs' and 'lexical classifiers' is typical of a modern epistemological approach... ."[6] In the English school[7] some voices seem to content themselves with Gardiner's definition of the so-called determinative, which reads – "It appears to determine the meaning of the foregoing sound-signs and to define that meaning in a general way."[8] This definition is lacking, to say the least, as very few classifiers in the hieroglyphic script just '*determine* the *meaning* (my italics) of the foregoing sound'. It is specifically the case only in examples where the phonetic information may lead to two or more signifiers, and then to two distinct signifieds. In these cases, the classifier may help the reader to choose the correct signified. However, certain scripts operate as successful communication and information systems providing only incomplete phonetic information (consonants only) that may lead the reader to two or even more signifieds. The writing system of Old and Modern Hebrew are conspicuous examples of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, these systems operate smoothly and the final signifier/d is usually determined by contextual or pragmatic considerations.[9]

In any case, Gardiner's approach limits the role of the 'determinative' to that of a mere tool for reaching the correct semantic value of a word. It disregards the complex network of additional information provided by the iconic nature of the sign that is activated in this role.

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[6] Loprieno 2003: 237-238.

[7] McDonald 2004.

[8] Gardiner 1957: 31 and Obs. on the same page.

[9]. The signifier ספר in modern Hebrew carries the meaning '(he) counted', '(he) recounted', 'scribe', 'book' and 'barber'. The context defines the meaning and helps the reader to make the correct choice.

Moreover, only a small group of classifiers adheres to the function of 'defining the meaning in a general way' - the next element in Gardiner's short definition.[10] This definition may stand for a very general description of one type of classifier that will be defined later by Gardiner as 'generic determinative', which gives the reader, what he calls 'a kind of sense' of the word. However a closer look at this phenomenon has demonstrated that some of the classifiers of this type stand in taxonomic relations with the word they 'determine' and may be looked upon as the superordinate category to which the word belongs.[11]

At this stage of our discussion, one may wonder, why the new 'name' for this script phenomenon is so important, and why it makes any difference at all if one uses the term 'determinative' or 'classifier'.

By accepting the hypothesis that we are facing a classifier system in the hieroglyphic script, we move the so-called 'determinative' from their traditional, vague meta-linguistic status - as carriers of information which stands 'outside language' - into the legitimate *linguistic* discussion, as the phenomenon of linguistic classifiers makes an important part of the cutting edge of research today in general linguistics, cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics.

The fundamental assumption of the study of classifiers in linguistics, anthropology and cognitive linguistics is that classifiers reflect the way the *world is perceived and understood* by a certain society or group. In this case, when using the term 'classifier', a new working hypothesis is introduced into Egyptology, suggesting that words collected under one classifier mirror the *existence of a class or a category in the Egyptian collective mind*.

Should this assumption be correct, the collection of all words classified by a certain classifier would unveil to us the various categories in the 'mind of the Egyptian culture'. Words that always take a certain classifier stand in the center of a category

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[10] For a comparison between Gardiner and Champollion, and for a discussion of Champollion's detailed approach, see Goldwasser 2006.

[11] Goldwasser 2002.

whereas words that take the classifier only occasionally would be fringe members in the same category.

The first collection of words under one classifier was attempted by Wiesmann as early as 1922.[12] He attempted to collect all words in the Pyramid Texts that take the classifiers ![glyph] and ![glyph] . His article does not go far beyond partial collection, but it already represents clearly some elements of the basic structure of the two categories. A pioneering step in the search of the 'Ancient Egyptian collective mind' through the classifiers was taken by Herman Te Velde (already in the 1970s) when he collected the words in the script taking the Seth ![glyph] classifier. In his book *Seth God of Confusion* he presented to his reader 'the Sethian category' of the Egyptian culture.[13] However, in this early study he did not inform the reader which word always takes the Seth classifier and in which word the classifier is optional. Thus it is impossible for the reader to judge which words are central members in the Sethian category, and which words stand on the fringe of the category, overlapping with other, different categories.[14] Research conducted in the Jerusalem school during the last decade has started to illuminate the categories ![glyph] ![glyph] and ![glyph] .[15] The [DIVINE] category was studied through genre- and corpus-sensitive research, which is essential for dealing with a multi-member, stratified, and dynamic category of the Egyptian culture such as [DIVINE].[16]

A strong corroboration of the hypothesis that the 'determinatives' in the hieroglyphic script play the role of classifiers is offered by a new study in the field of

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[12] Wiesmann 1922. His lists are incomplete and lacking in many respects; however, the attempt to collect all words under one classifier even in a closed corpus was not repeated. His research represents the important approach of corpus- and genre-sensitive study.

[13] Te Velde 1977.

[14] On the Sethian category, see also Goldwasser 2005.

[15] Goldwasser 2002, David 2000.

[16] Shalomi-Hen 2006.

general linguistic by Colette Grinevald.[17] In certain quarters of linguistics, voices were raised again and again, to the effect that all languages are to a certain degree 'classifier languages'. In this important study, she draws a clear line between what she calls 'classifier systems' versus 'noun-class *gender* systems'. In an effort to distinguish the two phenomena, she writes:

> Classifiers constitute overt systems of nominal categorization of clear lexical origin used in specific morphosyntactic constructions. They distinguish themselves from purely lexical systems in their marking categories of noun beyond the noun word itself, in independent morphemes or in affixes on other elements of the clause. They are distinct from noun class-gender systems however in their incomplete grammaticalization, in remaining of a lexical nature and having a discursive use within specific syntactic configurations.[18]
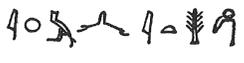
She thereupon gives the list of differences between the 'classifier languages', and 'noun class-gender systems':

Classifier systems	Noun class-gender systems
1. Do not classify all nouns.	Classify *all* nouns
2. Into largish number	Into a smallish number of classes
3. Of an open system	Of a *closed* system
4. Independent constituent	Fused with other grammatical categories (Def, Nb, Case)
6. Marked once (no agreement)	Realized in agreement patterns
7. Noun possibly assigned to various classes at speaker will	Noun uniquely assigned to a class with no speaker variation
8. Formal/informal uses context and register effects	No variation in register

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[17] Grinevald 2000. For her earlier publications, see Craig 1986 and 1994.

[18] Grinevald 2000: 61

Every Egyptologist would identify the left side of the table as pertaining to the case of the hieroglyphs.[19] Occasionally words are left unclassified (very often as a result of space limitations[20]), a large number of classifiers are indeed known (no complete list was ever compiled), the system knows many variations and developments, and classifiers stand independently, mostly at the end of the word before the grammatical suffixes. Classifiers are almost never realized in agreement patterns,[21] and classifiers may be subjected to writer's choice.[22] Context and register effects are known (e.g. religious texts, magical texts, lapidary historical texts etc).

Elsewhere Grinevald remarks[23] that "Classifiers are realized as free morphemes standing in a noun phrase, next to the noun itself or within the boundaries of the noun phrase with other determiners of the noun." Such examples are also not uncommon in the Egyptian script in all periods. An interesting early example from the Pyramid Texts[24] gives the spelling ![glyphs] for *iḫm iwt*, 'the one who doesn't know the *iwt* fields'. The classifier ![glyph] clearly refers to the *iḫm* 'ignorant'. Studies in cognitive linguistics have indicated that the human body is regarded by human beings as a container, either of food, words, thoughts, or feelings. This metaphoric conceptualization must stand behind the use of the hieroglyph ![glyph] (originally probably the prototypical

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[19] Here lapidary hieroglyphs, cursive hieroglyphs and all their 'hybrid' forms are meant. Hieratic obeys somewhat different rules.

[20] Some nouns, such as *msḥ* 'crocodile' reject classification, and take only a repeater. On these problems see Goldwasser 2002.

[21] One counter-example (confirming the rule) is listed by Kammerzell 1999: 85 (example 51, no. 4): in one instance in the Coffin Texts, the verb *w(n)m* "eat," which has a female subject there, is written with the classifier of a woman holding a tablet of food.

[22] Usually the choice is made among a few classifiers that are optional for a certain word.

[23] Grinevald 2000: 64.

[24] Pyr. 367a (N)

notion *wnm* 'eat,', 'put food into the body'[25]) as classifier of words relating to the semantic fields mentioned above. This most important category of the script is based on the conceptual metaphors [THE BODY IS A CONTAINER] and [IDEAS ARE FOOD].[26]

Two issues that stand in the center of classifier studies of the last decade are the interrelated questions: (1) the phenomenon's 'raison d'être', and (2) its development from early stages onwards. However, as result of this quest, the spotlight was recently turned on the topic of 'repeaters'. Some scholars believe they stand at the foundation of the classification systems.[27] Nevertheless, all linguistic classifier systems reach us in a 'mature' phase, after advanced grammaticalization processes, with semantically opaque classifiers, and heterogeneous categories.[28]

In my earlier contribution for Polotsky, I suggested that it is this type of classifiers, the 'repeaters', that gets in the way of Egyptologists, preventing them from considering the so-called determinatives as a classification *system*. Repeaters have been defined by linguists as 'echo classifiers', 'identical classifiers', or 'semantische dummies'.[29] It was also suggested that they are only fillers of a syntactic slot.[30] The most

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[25] See Kammerzell 1999 and Schenkel 2002 for a detailed discussion of the verb *wnm*.

[26] For a more detailed discussion see Goldwasser 2005. For the conceptual metaphor [IDEAS ARE FOOD] see Kovecses 2000: 141. For the conceptual metaphor [THE BODY IS A CONTAINER] see Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson 2003. King Akhenaton says about his god '*bἰ3t.f m ḥt.ἰ*', 'his ideas are in my body' Sandman 1938: 76, line 12. See also Shalomi-Hen 1988.

[27] 'I assume . . . that most if not all Kilivila Classifier Particles (CP) indeed originate in nouns: originally, I suppose, the CP system was constituted by, and consisted of, 'repeaters' – that is, 'nouns' that are used as their own 'CPs' – only. In the course of time these repeaters were changed and modified . . .' (Senft 2000: 39). Colette Grinevald suggests that 'The most common source of classifier morphemes are nouns, as it is commonly seen in the phenomenon of repeaters' (Craig 1994: 568).

[28] These criteria are suggested by Grinevald 2000. An illuminating example of such a categorization system is the Dyirbal language, discussed in Lakoff 1986.

[29] Senft 1993: 102, and Senft 2000a: 22.

[30] It seems that at a later stage of the script development, there was indeed a feeling of a 'slot to be filled' at the end of a word.

famous example is the numeral classifier *qéin ta qéin* 'one house', in Burmese.[31] Over time, morphemic repeaters in classifier languages show the tendency to be superseded by more general classifiers, or to become themselves general classifiers.[32] Senft gives the example of the noun for 'clay pot', that when activated as classifier refers to 'pot-like' entities in general.[33] This movement is well known in the Egyptian script system, and stands at the roots of the typical formation of a classifier. A good comparison is the *ꜣpd*

duck, which appears as a repeater after the noun *ꜣpd*, yet clearly very early becomes the [BIRD] classifier, probably because it was once the prototypical bird of the Nile river banks.[34]

This procedure takes place on the diachronic level again and again in the hieroglyphic script, when more general classifiers take the place of specific classifiers. However, in Egyptian the 'road back' stays open, and we may find scribes or traditions that go back to the old-fashioned repeater. Reasons may range from archaism or idiosyncratic choice, to picture-sensitive texts.[35]

All classifier languages studied to date are relatively 'mature' systems,[36] and the road for a reconstruction of their Ur-system is paved with many difficulties. In this matter, the Egyptian script system has a big advantage, being relatively a very 'young' system. The noun-origin of the classifiers is recognizable, and categories show a high level of semantic transparency. The ability to analyze new members into their correct

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[31] See Allan 1977: 292. An example from Kilivila is *bogi-tala bogi* 'one night.' the word *bogi* means 'night.' Senft 2000b: 44 note 12.

[32] Senft 1993: 105.

[33] The language studied is Kilivila; see Senft 1993: 106.

[34] For a discussion on this example and others, see Goldwasser 1999, 2002.

[35] Yet one should carefully compare texts of the same genre and production. Hieratic examples should be treated very carefully after checking the specific reasons that may have caused changes (fused groups of signs, 'easy' conventional hieratic signs, etc.).

[36] Lee 1988: 226.

category is also a sign of a dynamic, 'young' system.[37] A look at the collections of Semitic words written in Egyptian will show that in most cases the word entered the Egyptian written lexicon with the correct semantic classifier![38]

As classifiers appear only in the script (as far as we know), the beginning of the script must reflect the beginning of the classifier system. Nevertheless, the very early hieroglyphic records should be analyzed very carefully. The corpus of texts dating to the 1st Dynasty is in no way homogeneous. It includes various genres such as seals (mostly seal-impressions), jar tags, and small funerary stelae. In many cases (especially seals and tags), space limitation may have prevented the free use and development of classifiers.[39] Due to this concise way of writing, the reading of the seals and tags may differ or be too conjectural.

A valuable corpus for the study of the emergence of classification in hieroglyphics is the corpus of first dynasty stelae from Abydos published by Petrie. These non-royal funerary stelae show hieroglyphic combinations that should be read phonetically mostly to reach a signified that is a personal name (sometimes with a title). In these stelae, the constraints of space do not seem to be a factor. After the name a classifier is regularly added. Most names are female names, but males are also known.[40] Three stelae bear a [DOG] classifier already showing the 'politically

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[37] See Grinevald 2000: 84-5.

[38] For numerous examples, see Hoch 1994; His collection contains hundreds of examples. See also the Canaanite word עיזים with the correct [HIDE AND TAIL] classifier, *apud* Shisha-Halevy 1978. See also Goldwasser 2006: 28-30.

[39] This limitation causes the same effect also in much later finds. Inscribed scarabs, a most common item from the 13th dynasty onwards, show in many cases very shortened versions of words and in most cases omit classifiers. Otherwise, classifiers are in full use in the script during this period. The same phenomenon of shortened writing can be discerned sometimes in end lines of stelae. .

[40] Petrie 1901-2, Pls. XXXI-XXXII (Part I), Pls. XXVI-XXVII (Part II). As a rule, in later inscriptions, titles appear always before the personal name. This excludes the option that the male and female hieroglyphs are ideograms standing for a title.

correct' dog of the Egyptian dynastic period.[41] A few stelae seem to show the classifier [DWARF].[42] One example clearly represents the classifier [SOLDIER] .[43] These stelae show 'gender classifiers', at the very beginning of the system.[44] In some cases, the human classifiers seem to be larger than the other icons in the stelae. This phenomenon of accentuating the human classifier may reach its peak in the examples of a large-scale icon of the dead person activated as 'classifier' or even the cases of a three-dimention classifier for a name, as in the famous statue of Rahotep.[45] This sensitivity to gender/class surfaces again throughout the history of the script. First person pronouns show in the pictorial 'covert gender/class categories' that do not exist on the phonetic level, to the best of our knowledge. The iconic classifiers are an additional level of classification that probably does not materialize in the spoken language.[46] The sensitivity to gender classification may have also surfaced in rare cases when a 'gender-obscured' foreign noun was assigned a gender through a classifier. Such rare example may be the important Canaanite word ברכה 'blessing,' which takes the classifier.[47]

A somewhat unexpected classifier which emerges in the very early stages of the script is . An ideogram of a prototypical verb of movement, probably *iw*, stands at the

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[41] See Goldwasser 2002.

[42] A clear example seems to be *ḏd*, stela no.58.

[43] Stela no.29.

[44] For the occurrences of and as classifiers in texts from Dynasties 1-3, see Kahl 1994: 421, 435-6.

[45] For the statue of Rahotep, and the stela of Wepemnofret, see Stevenson Smith 1981: 84-85. Did space concerns play a role in the case of Rahotep?

[46] Gardiner 1957: 39, 45, 62. Kammerzell 1993: 248. On the complicated relations between classification, gender, and person, see Corbett 1991: 137, and passim; see also Siewierska 2004: 104-5. On the origin of gender in 'noun classes' see Craig 1994: 568.

[47] Hoch 1994: 103.

base of the hieroglyph.[48] When activated as a classifier, the sign ◹ assumes a much more general meaning. A very early example (King Aha, 1st Dynasty) was published by Simpson.[49] Written on an expensive stone bowl, this inscription was not subjugated to the space limitation of a small item. The verb *pḥrỉ (pḥrr ?)* appears in the phrase *sp tpy pḥrr ḥp*, 'first occasion of the running of the Apis' (lit. 'first occasion [that] the Apis runs'?) which may well be a 'that form', i.e., a substantive form.[50]
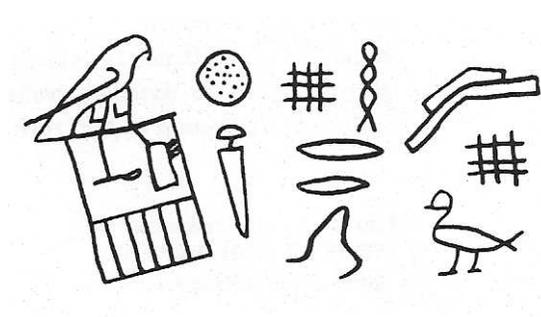

Fig.1 An early example of the classifier ◹ (or ◹ ?) (After Simpson 1957, fig.2)

Verb classification is not a very common phenomenon in classifier languages, and nouns show a priority for classification in most languages. This observable fact has attracted all sorts of explanations. Senft suggests that "It is that nouns are continuing discourse subjects and are therefore in constant need of referential devices of identification."[51]

A canonical religious genre of text, and probably of script, are the Pyramid Texts. These exquisite hieroglyphic texts of the royal pyramids of dynasties 5-6, were designed to serve the religious needs of the kings for eternity. They present a social and paleographic dialect of Egyptian religious language that must have emerged from

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[48] For verbs as origins of classifiers, see Craig 1994: 568.

[49] Simpson 1957. Kahl records *pḥrr*, *wpỉ*, and *sỉn*, in the 3rd Dynasty. See Kahl 1994: 456.

[50] The combination *pḥrỉ ḥp* is translated 'der Auslauf des Apis.' by the Wörterbuch. The example in Fig. 1 above was still unknown to the Wörterbuch compilers, see Wb I 541, 12.

[51] Joseph Greenberg, cited by Senft 2000b: 13.

the center of the Egyptian canon of the period. The inscriptions are less constrained by space limitations caused either by the nature of an item or by resources concerns. The compilers and writers should have belonged to the scribal elite of the period.

This rich corpus, even considering its incomplete representation in the excellent (if old) publication of Sethe, yields fascinating results concerning early classification processes in the script. Most classifiers are consistent, i.e., they appear in more than one example of the same word in the corpus of texts.

Are repeaters the prominent type of classifier in the Pyramid Texts?

Repeaters are indeed an important group of classifiers in these texts. Even if specific divine names or paraphernalia are excluded, we still find a large group of nouns that present clear repeaters. All words mentioned below present complete phonetic information and thus the following classifier is a mere pictorial tautology.

šnḏt (Pyr.369 [**W**]) 'skirt'
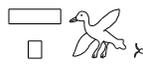
špꜣ (Pyr.244a [**W**,T]) 'centipede'
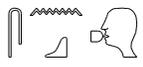
snḫ (Pyr.623a [T]) 'suckled'

rwt (Pyr.603a [T,N]) 'gate'

ḏrt (Pyr.16c [**W**]) 'hand'

ḫni (Pyr.1770a [N]) 'alight'

snḥm (Pyr.1772b [N]) 'locust'

However, in the meantime, the Pyramid Texts unmistakably present a highly developed system of 'real' classification, and a few superordinate categories are very clearly attested.

The most intriguing are the movement categories ⟨glyph⟩ and ⟨glyph⟩ . The classifier ⟨glyph⟩ appears mainly with clearly 'verbal' lexemes.[52] Most verbs denote horizontal movement. The 'negative' classifier of movement, or movement in the 'opposite' direction - *ḥm*, 'retreat'- also *denotes* a horizontal movement.[53] The verb *prỉ* 'go out' is conspicuously absent, although the word is amply attested in the texts. As *prỉ* may denote the starting moment of the movement, it would not be a 'movement verb' that denotes a movement from point (a) to point (b).[54] A few combinations of phono-ideograms belong to the [MOVEMENT] category. The verbs *ỉy* ⟨glyph⟩ , *šm* ⟨glyph⟩ , and *ỉs (sbỉ)* ⟨glyph⟩ denote mostly horizontal movements and are natural members of the category. The verb *ỉnỉ* ⟨glyph⟩ also denotes a horizontal movement – 'bringing' – means the movement of an element from one place to another. The verb *ỉṯỉ* which carries the meaning 'seize' almost always appears with the phono-ideogram ⟨glyph⟩ .[55] An interesting

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[52] Naturally also in participial nouns created along the verbs.

[53] The reversed ship (see below, Table 2) represents the general notion of being 'upside down'. It must not refer to ships. The first example in Table 2 refers to a serpent. The picture ⟨glyph⟩ is the ultimate representation of dysfunction; it may also describe general dysfunction in life. (e.g. Gardiner & Černý 1957, pl. LXXVIII, line 4)

[54] The verb *ꜥḥꜥ* which gets the ⟨glyph⟩ classifier in Middle Egyptian (Wb. I, 218) is also excluded from the category in the Pyramid Texts. However, in this case the orientation of the movement is different. Theoretically, it may be the *grammatical* role of the verb in Middle Egyptian, which involves a 'movement in narration sequence' (e.g. *ꜥḥꜥ.n sḏm.n.f*) that contributed to its inclusion in the [MOVEMENT] category. However, Lee mentions the fact that 'early systems' may leave some nouns outside a category, see Lee 1988: 235-236.

[55] Ariel Shisha-Halevy observes that in many languages, some verbs of motion are associated with (and correlate with) deictic-personal locutive (1st person), allocutive (2nd person) or delocutive (3rd person) perspectives or spheres (consider 'come' and 'go', Mod. Welsh 'mynd' and 'dyfod'). The 'bring' lexemes may also be thus distinguishable: 'fetch' and 'carry', Turkish 'göndermek' and 'getirmek', and, for that matter, Egyptian *ỉṯỉ* and *ỉnỉ*, and Coptic tnnoou and joou. Welsh

example from the Pyramid Texts in this context is *iṯ.k gst.k* 'run your course'.[56] However *iṯi* soon gets the additional [FORCE] classifier,[57] as probably the classification was felt to be unsufficient. Thus this verb may be considered to be a fringe member of the category [MOVEMENT]. The category contains intransitive and some transitive verbs (see Table 1).

The category is a smaller one. Besides ships of different kinds, we find a few verbs which get the [BOAT] classifier. Here we find a typical culture-bound Egyptian category that reflects the importance of the Nile. It already reflects the conceptual metaphor [LIFE IS A JOURNEY ON THE NILE] that prevails later in the Egyptian culture.

To sum up, a glance into the early phases of classification in the hieroglyphic script, testifies to a system in which repeaters are an important part, but 'real classification', i.e., classification into super-ordinate classes starts as early as the system itself. Thus the study of early classification in the hieroglyphic system does not support an evolution hypothesis, hypothesizing an 'all repeaters' early systems that have evolved through grammaticalization processes into more general 'real classifiers'. It is very clear that one of the first classes reflected in the script is the 'gender' [MALE/FEMALE +HUMAN] versus 'non-human' class. Basic-level class also appears, such as [DAWRF] and [SOLDIER]. The 'non-human' class is represented also on

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expresses these notions and this distinction by the corresponding verbs of motion with the preposition 'with': 'dyfod a-,' 'mynd a-.'

[56] Pyr. 1167a, for the translation see Faulkner 1969: 188. See also Pyr. 1346, b.

[57] Gardiner 1957: 523.

the generic level, by the [DOG] classifier.[58] A little later, in the early stage of the Pyramid Texts, we witness the emergence of the categories ⟁ and ⌣.[59]

The early emergence of the ⟁ category that contains a (surprisingly) large number of verbal expressions shows that at least in the Egyptian case classification may be lexeme-bound and not grammeme-bound. On the cultural level, it reflects the importance of movement and communication in the Old Kingdom. The freedom of movement and open roads were the result of the successful central administration, i.e., the Egyptian state. It was the movement of people, materials and commodities that created and made possible the splendor of the Old Kingdom. The importance of 'moving commodities' may be reflected in the ideogram 𓂽 which in many occasions stands in line with the ideogram 𓂾.[60] Both hieroglyphs describe pictorially and verbally the movement of human beings and commodities.[61] The early appearance of the ⌣ as a parallel movement category points to the central place the Nile occupies in the 'collective Egyptian mind'. This phenomenon is reflected in manifold ways in the Egyptian culture, from the description of rain in foreign countries as the 'the Nile

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[58] For a complex gender-class system, compare Reconstructed Bantu (Craig 1994: 565).

[59] Another important category that emerges in the Pyramid Texts but is not studied here is the [PLACE] category represented by the ⊗ and ⌣⌣ classifiers. The ⌣⌣ category may be the first superordinate category to emerge according to our knowledge to date (for this 'determinative' see Kahl 2001: 118). Dreyer, who found the tablet, does not see here a classifier (Dreyer 1998: 119, Abb 76, 59). Many ingredients, liquids, and non-liquids show different variations (basic-level members?) of the [CONTAINER] classifier during the Old Kingdom. Even if theoretically it is a schematic (metonymic) classifier, it may be actually regarded as a sort of repeater, as many ingredients in this period show typical containers.

[60] See below Table 1, Pyr. 253c. For the combination 𓂾𓂽 see Metropolitan Museum.

[61] 𓄿 𓏤𓂾𓂾𓂽⌣ 𓂾𓄿𓏦𓊑 ⌣ *is inw.f bt̠ sin(w).f*, Pyr. 253c (W), 'his messengers go, his couriers run'.

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in heaven' to the parallel river of the netherworld, and to the metaphoric description of death as 'mooring'.[62]

As Polotsky has shown, the Egyptian verb undergoes syntactic transpositions, which enable it to behave as a substantive or adverbial phrase. Did this 'nominal identity' that 'dresses up'[63] the Egyptian verb contribute to its ability to adopt classifiers, which are typical of substantives? It is difficult to answer this question. Maybe because as soon as "…we wish to talk about an action as such, we nominalize it"?[64]

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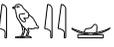
[62] The word *iwi* 'be boatless' 𓇋𓅱𓇋𓇋𓊛 with the boat classifier is already known in the Pyramid Texts (Pyr. 1188a [P,M,N]), for this kind of classification., see Goldwasser 1995: 92-93.

[63] In his 'transpositions' Polotsky used the French verb 'revêtir,' a (dead?) metaphor which may leave the verb intact under the 'nominal costume.'

[64] Joseph Greenberg, cited by Senft 2000a: 13.

Table 1 –The movement classifiers ⩗ and ⩘ in the Pyramid Texts[65]

⩗	⩘
ỉw 194c (W); 200a-d (W,N); 201a-d (W,N); 221c (W,T, M, N) 'come'	*ỉtḥ* 303c (W) 'tow'
wn 646c (T); 622a (T) 'run'	
bṯ 140b (W); 253c (W) 'run'	
pḥ 335a (W,T) 'reach'	
pḥr 949b (P) – mistake for *pḥ*?	
pšš, 2100b (N) 'straddle'	
nmt 325a (W) ꞌstrideꞌ 853b (M,N)	*nmỉ* 1260b (P,N) 'travel'
ntꜣỉ 2174a (N) 'run'	
hꜣỉ 1198a (M,N) 'come down'	*hy* 303d (W,T) 'fast a ship'?
hꜣb 491c (W) 'send'	
ḥḥy 972a (M) 'seek'	
ḫꜣp 1081b (P) 'run'	
ḫpỉ, 1245e (N) 'travel'	
ẖns 130d (M) *ẖns*, 130d (T) 'traverse'	*ẖns* 130d (W, N) 'traverse'
sỉn 681a (T) 'run'	*ẖn* 303c (W,T) 'row'
swꜣ 1351c (P) 'pass'	
sḫp 2081b (N) 'lead'	
sšm 952d (M,N) 'guide'	
skr(t), 1847 (N) 'travel'?	

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[65] I did not attempt to present the reader with a comprehensive list of occurrences of these verbs in the Pyramid Texts.

⌐ ⌂ 𓊨 *stp* 947 classifier in (M,N) only. 'leap up', also 1321c (P)	𓈙 *skd* 129c (W,T,M,N) 'sail' 'travel'
𓄜 *sḏꜣ* 914c (P) 'go'	𓂧ꜣ *ḏꜣ* 311d (W,T) 'ferry, interfere', 1215, a (P,M,N) - *ḏꜣ tꜣ* - 'cross the land'
𓈙ꜣ*s* *šꜣs* 325a (W) 'travel'	

Table 2 – 'reversed notion' classifiers: 𓊨 and 𓌙 in the Pyramid Texts

𓈖 *ỉnn*, 2060 (N); 2061a (N) – 'turn about'	𓊽𓂧 *pꜣḥd* 685a (T) – 'turn upside down'
𓎛𓅓 *ḥm* 238b (W); 554b (T,M); (but N: 𓊨 !) 'turn back'	*pnꜥ* 226b (W); 227c (W); 518c (P) 'turn upside down'
𓐍𓏏𓐍 *ẖtẖt* 1071a (P) 'turn back'	

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