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Sweeney, Deborah

What's a Rhetorical Question?

What's a Rhetorical Question?

Deborah Sweeney, Jerusalem

In my doctorate[1], I described how letter writers structure their texts around quotations from their correspondants' letters or from letters of third parties; what they choose to quote, what they omit, how they mark off material from the other letter and how they compose their reaction to this quotation. Like many linguistically orientated Egyptologists, I am interested in the relationship between pragmatics and syntax, most specifically in how people communicate with one another, and in particular how in conversations and correspondance one partner fits her or his utterances to what they have already heard on the one hand or expect to hear from their partner on the other.

In the context of this research, I was most excited to read Junge's review[2] of Silverman's book[3]; this was one of the rare occasions that Egyptologists discuss the two sides of conversations. I was delighted to recognise the idea of structuring one's contribution in expectation of a response from one's hearer – putting the dialogue and the audience back into consideration. Junge made two basic points:

1. Questions with initial *jn* and *jn-jw* are not always information-orientated. They shade from the informative through questions with a preferred response (like Would you like to have coffee with me after the lecture?) into the downright rhetorical.

2. These types of questions requiring different answers have different sentence structures.

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[1] D. Sweeney, *Interquotation in Non-Literary Letters from the Ramesside Period*, Jerusalem 1990 (unpublished).

[2] Junge, *BiOr* 40 (1983), 545-559.

[3] Silverman, *Interrogative Constructions.*

If an Ancient Egyptian was banging on his neighbour's door in the morning and shouting "Have you got up yet?" he would use *jn* + *jw* + subject + stative[4]; if his friend opened the door and gazed at him blearily with one eye open, the Egyptian might want to ask the same question rhetorically, and then he would use *jn* + subject + stative.[5]

Most Egyptologists use verb forms or sentence structures as their starting points; some, such as Sarah Groll's school, like Groll herself, Orly Goldwasser or Shlomit Israeli, and also the late Callender, use larger chunks of text, and investigate how pragmatics can elucidate why various verb forms are chosen or what they can express. Simply by way of experiment, I chose to start from a purely pragmatic definition and see what might emerge as the link between pragmatics and syntax if one reversed the process. I was tempted to do something extreme by the desire to exemplify a tendency I see existing in Egyptological research, where lingustic models are used as the jumping-off point, often erecting an elaborate theoretical structure before any reference to the texts.

I started by defining information-seeking questions and assessing how rhetorical questions differ from them. Questions are defined according to their preconditions, which refer to the knowledge and motivation of A, the speaker, and B, the hearer.

Questions proper are asked in order to obtain information.[6] This information is known to B alone, not to A or to both A and B – a point which is relevant to Junge's definition of rhetorical questions. Following that eminently entertaining linguist Labov, we can call them A-events, B-events and AB-events.[7] For present company at this conference, AB-events would be the published works of Polotsky; B-events, known to you but not to me, would be what time conference participants with jet-lag think it *really* is, and A-events, known to me but not to you, would be the dire secrets of my murky past.

The preconditions of questions[8] are:

1. A does not know information X
2. A wants to know information X
3. Information X is knowable
4. B knows X

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[4] Junge, *BiOr* 40 (1983), 558.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Lyons, *Semantics* 2, 754.

[7] Labov, in: *Studies in Social Interaction*, 124. Note the distinction made by Searle, *Speech Acts*, 66 between real questions and "exam questions", where A asks B to find out whether B knows X.

[8] Compare Labov - Fanshel, *Therapeutic Discourse*, 89; Searle, *Speech Acts*, 66.

5. B is willing to tell A X

6. B would not necessarily have told A X without being asked.

For example, in pWestcar, Rudjedet, after her maternity leave, asks to be updated on the housekeeping.

(1)   pWestcar 11, 19-20

$'ḥ'.n ḏd.n.s n wb3.t.s jn jw p3 pr sspd 'ḥ'.n ḏd.n.s jw.f sspd m bw nb nfr$ "And then she said to her maidservant, 'Is the house prepared?' and then she said, 'It is prepared with everything good'."

Initially, I will define rhetorical questions as questions which are *not* asked with the view of eliciting new information from B. Next, I shall weed out two other classes of speech acts which also have interrogative form, and also do not elicit new information from B, but are nonetheless not rhetorical questions – indirect requests phrased as questions and questions which A answers himself.

1.   Indirect requests where A asks B to do something by means other than a direct order – for example, instead of "Close the window," "Can you close the window?" which conventionally "acts as" a request to close the window, rather than as a question about B's window-closing abilities.[9]

        The linguists Labov and Searle explain that these constructions function as indirect speech acts by making semantically explicit statements or questions about the preconditions for the command, and in particular about B's future or current actions.[10]

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[9] See Searle, in: *Syntax and Semantics* 3, 59-82, and Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 263 ff. A may even hint, "It's cold in here." The speaker does not make explicit what he expects the hearer to do, and so the hearer may not necessarily 'take up' this request by closing the window. He may, for instance, turn up the heating instead.

[10] Searle, *Syntax and Semantics* 3, 71-72. Labov supplies a rule for indirect requests (Labov - Fanshel, *Therapeutic Discourse*, 82) which states that:

If A makes to B a request for information or an assertion about:
a. The existential status of an action X to be performed by B
b. The consequences of performing action X
c. The time T1 that an action X might be performed by B
d. Any of the preconditions for a valid request for X as given in the Rule of Requests (Labov - Fanshel, *Therapeutic Discourse*, 78):

(2)   Letters to the Dead VI, 2-4

jr t3 b3k.t Jmjw ntt mr.tj (j)n n ʿḥ3.n.k ḥr.s grḥ hrw ḥnʿ jrr nb r.s jrr.t nb.t r.s "As for the maidservant *Jmiw* who is ill, can't you fight for her night and day with every man and every woman who acts against her?"[11]

Despite the question format, the response which A wants is an action by B, not information from B. Answering these requests as if they were questions counts as manipulative discourse, deliberately missing the point.[12]

2.   Questions which A answers himself.

(3)   CT II 331d -332d

(If A addresses to B an imperative specifying an action X at a time T1, and B believes that A believes that :
ia. X should be done (for a purpose Y)
ib. B would not do X in the absence of the request,
ii. B has the ability to do X (with an instrument Z)
iii. B has the obligation to do X or is willing to do it
iv. A has the right to tell B to do X
then A as heard as making a valid request for action.)

and all other preconditions are in effect, then A is heard as making a valid request of B for the act X.

[11] Cf. Hekanakhte II 44 *(j)n nn ṯr.ṯn n.j ḥbs.wt(.j)* "Will you not be respecting my wife for me?" Peas. B1, 8-9 *jn nn r.f dj.k sw3.n ḥr w3.t* "Won't you really allow us to pass upon the road?" pWestcar 5, 19 *jn n ḫn.n.ṯn* "Can't you row any longer?" and *JEA* 56 pl. 46 r 2; Urk. I 129, 6-8; pBerlin 10016 v 4a-5a (see Silverman, *Interrogative Constructions*, 12); pBoulaq 8 r 13-14, and for Late Egyptian pAnastasi V 22, 5; LES 72, 11-12; LRL 46, 10; Černý - Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca*, 46, 2 r 8-9; pSallier I 4, 1. Most of these are corroboration questions. The same applies to vetitives. Peas. R 53 *jn ḥnd.k ḥr ḥbs.w.j* "Is it upon my clothes that you are going to tread?" Peas. B1, 18 *jn ʿw3.tw.j r.f m sp3.t.f* "Is it really in his nome that I will be robbed?" Cf. for Late Egyptian LES 37, 12-13; LES 38, 6-7 ; (// LES 41,16 - 42, 3); LES 75, 11-12. Junge, *BiOr* 40 (1983), 547-548, discusses initial prospective *stp.f* forms as indirect requests. However, other forms are also used – *n stp.n.k* (Gardiner - Sethe, *Eg. Letters to the Dead*, VI, 3; pWestcar 5, 19) *jw stp.n.k* pBerlin 10016, 4a (See Silverman, *Interrogative Constructions*, 12.) In Late Egyptian, however, indirect requests can also take a third future (Černý - Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca*, 46, 2 v 8-9) *bw jrj.k stp* (LES 72, 11) or a *tw.k m nʿjj* verb form (LRL 46.10) or *jḫ* + defined verb form (pAnastasi V 22, 5; pSallier I 4, 1) and the point seems to be that the hearer's present or future action is called into question, rather than that a specific verb form is used.

[12] E.g. "Have you left the door open again?" "Yes." Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis*, 106.
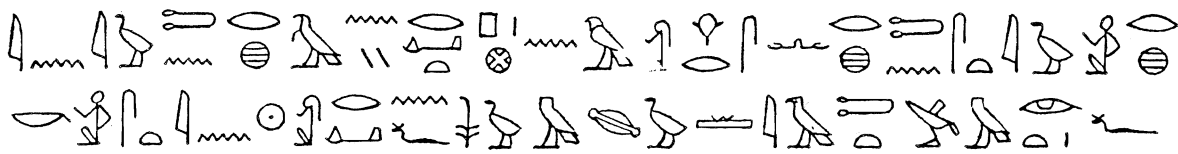
jn jw.tn rḫ.twnj rdj.t P n Ḥrw ḥr.s n rḫ.tn st jw.j rḫ.kwj st jn Rʿ rdj n.f sw m jsw jȝṯ.t m jr.t.f "Do you know why Pe was given to Horus? You do not know it (but) I know it. It was Reʿ who gave it to him in compensation for the mutilation in his eye."[13]

In this example, the question is clearly not asked to obtain information since it stresses that the hearer does not know something. Since in the Coffin Texts these glosses alternate with frontal extrapositions introduced by *jr,* it seems that the question is simply a form of topicalisation.[14] Although information is supplied here, B is not the one who supplies it. B's response is, at the most, to attend more closely to the topic.

Let us investigate a number of rhetorical questions to see how they diverge from the basic preconditions of asking questions.

(4)   Adm. 11, 12-13

mtn sw ḥr ḏʿ[r r qd] ḥr m n tnj snḏw r sḫm-jb "Look, why does he seek to create when the timid has not been distinguished from the violent?"[15]

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[13] Cf. CT IV 229-230b *m tr r.f st nn n nṯr.w jm.jjw bȝḥ Ḥw pw ḥnʿ Sjȝ wnn ḥnʿ jtj.j Jtm m ḥr.t hrw nt rʿ nb* "Who are those gods who are in the presence? They are Hu and Sia who are with my father Atum the whole of every day." Also CT IV 188b-c, 191c-d, 201b-c, 204b-207a, 214b-215c, 216a-217c, 219b-221b, 223c-227a, 234a-237b, 238d-243d, 246b-249a, 252a-253b, 276b-281d, 286a-287b. Also Peas. B1, 199-200 *ḏȝ.t jtrw m-sȝ tb.tjj ḏȝ nfr nn* "Crossing the river on sandals is a good crossing? No!" Compare CT IV 101g-h, Hekanakhte I v 3-4, pWestcar 11, 6-8, and for Late Egyptian pAnastasi V 11, 6; KRI I 66, 2-5; LES 32, 14; LES 73, 15-16.

[14] Borghouts, in: *Crossroad,* 52. Compare the findings of Schifflein - Keenan - Platt, in: *Questions and Politeness.* On p. 53 they point out that caretakers of small children often ask and answer questions themselves in order to draw attention to something.

[15] Amenemope VI, 18-19 *m jr ḏd pȝ hrw mj dwȝ ph nn mj jḫ* "Do not say, 'Today is like tomorrow.' How will this end?" Amenemope XIX 11-12 *m jr sḏr tw jw.k <m>ḥrjj dwȝ ḥḏ tȝ dwȝ mj jḫ* "Do not lie down in fear of tomorrow. Comes today, how will tomorrow be?" Sin. B 122 *ptr smn djj.t r ḏw* "What would make papyrus cleave to the mountain?" Cf. Adm. 14, 14; Urk. IV 1344, 8-9, and for Late Egyptian LES 2, 12; LES 66,15 - 67,2; LES 73,16 - 74,1; LRL 36, 12. Note, however, that one can ask an unanswerable question in good faith, in which case it is not rhetorical. For example, the neighbour of little Maia (aged 6) has just been explaining to her about Israeli political parties. Maia: "But what about God?" – Neighbour: "What do you mean?" – Maia: "What about God – is He Likud or Labour?"

If we look at this question in terms of preconditions, it is obviously unknowable – the intentions of the gods are notoriously difficult to decipher.

(5)   pAnastasi I 20, 7-8
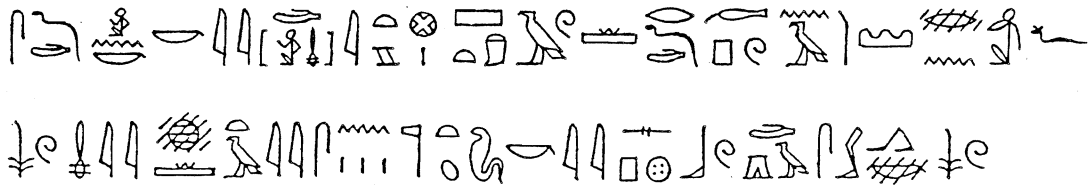
sḏd.j n.k kjj dmj št3 r-ḏd Kpnj rn.f sw mj jḥ t3jj.sn nṯr.t kjj zp bw dg3s.k sw "Let me tell you of another mysterious town: Byblos is its name. What is it like? And their goddess? Another time! You have never visited it."[16]

This question infringes the preconditions of normal questions because B does not know the answer (and indeed, the questions in pAnastasi I are asked explicitly in order to prove B's ignorance).[17] In this instance, Ramses II harangues his army after he has routed the Hittite onslaught single-handed.

(6)   Kadesh Poem 253-4
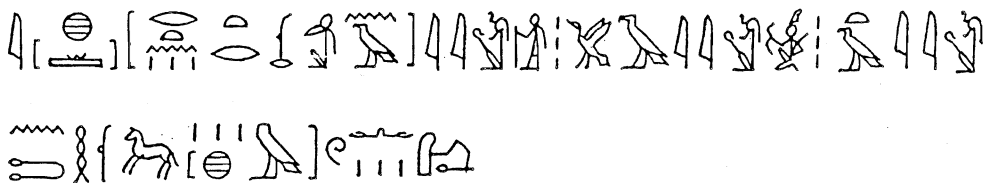
jḥ [r.tn tr n3]jj.j sr.w p3jj.j mš' t3jj.j ntḥtr [ḥm].w 'ḥ3 "What about you then, my captains, my soldiers, my charioteers who shirked the fight?"[18]

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[16] LES 66, 13-14 *sw tnw p3 jmw n 'š j-dj n.k X sw tnw t3jj.f js.t Ḥ3rw* "Where is the cedar ship X gave you? Where is its Syrian crew?" LES 72, 2-3 *ḥr jn bn jw.w <r> dj.t.s n.k* "And what if they won't give it to you?" pAnastasi I passim; pAnastasi IV 10, 10-12; 11, 2-4.

[17]   Janet Johnson pointed out, during the discussion, that it might be possible to set up a hierarchy of rhetorical questions, with those which could be answered by people other than the addressee being more manipulative than those which are genuinely unanswerable. Labov - Fanshel, *Therapeutic Discourse*, 90.

[18] Hekanakhte XVI r 9 *jn mḏd.k jb n ḥm.t.k m sm3 pr.w.j* "Is it in (going as far as) slaying my household that you (are prepared to) follow the desires of my wife?" Kadesh Poem 218-219 *jḥ tr ḥr jb.k n3 ḥm.w ntjj bw ḫdn ḥr.j n ḥḥ.w jm.sn* "Why do you fear those weaklings whose multitudes I disregard?" Cf. Hekanakhte I v 2; Hekanakhte I v 16-17; Hekanakhte II 43; Lebensmüder 32-3; Peas. B1, 180; Piankhy 6, and for Late Egyptian pAbbott r 6, 1 (*KRI* VI 477, 3-4); Amenemope IV, 17; pAnastasi IV 10, 10-12; pAnastasi IV 11, 2-4; LES 16, 9-10; LES 37, 12-13; LES 45, 12; LES 59, 6-7; LRL 22, 1-2; oDeM 126 r 3-5; LRL 67,16 - 68,1; Kadesh Poem 92; Kadesh Poem 314; oGardiner 165 v 4-5 (*KRI* III 549, 8-10).

In this instance, A is asking a question to which he knows B is not prepared to reply – (trying to tease or irritate B by questioning him on some touchy point.) So far, A seems to be getting one up on B by putting him in the position of being unable to answer questions.

In the following example, the plaintiff is complaining in the Deir el-Medineh court against the son of the draughtsman Menna, an important man in the community.[19] The court, however, turns on the unhappy plaintiff and orders him a thrashing.

(7)   *KRI* V 579, 3-4 (pDeir el-Medineh 27, r 8-9)

jw n3 sr.w <ḥr> dj.t n.j n 100 n sḫt n štt3 r-dd j jj3 jḫ tw.k <ḥr> dd.f ...."And the officials gave me 100 blows of the birch, saying, 'Just what are you saying?!'"[20]

Here, the infringment of the preconditions is different. A does not want to hear B's answer, and refuses to give him a conversational turn.

The Eloquent Peasant, now in the throes of his seventh complaint before the steward Rensi, asks:

(8)   Peas. B1, 280-281

ḫn.j ḫpr m3jr.j dr ḫft ḥr.k ptr d3r.k "My speech is done, my grief is all before you. What do you want?"[21]

Again, A is not really interested in having this question answered, (this time for semantic reasons: having outlined his problem ad nauseam, the Peasant does not think the steward

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[19] See Janssen, in: *Gleanings from Deir el-Medîna*, 119-20.

[20] Cf. pAnastasi V 22, 5-6; pAnastasi V 15, 7; LES 13, 1.

[21] Cf. Hekanakhte II, 43-44 *ptr qjj n wnn.j ḥnʿ.tn m tt wʿ.t (j)n nn tr.tn n.j ḥbs.wt(j.)* "What then is the point of my being with you in one household? Will you not then respect my wife for me?" pAnastasi IV 9, 4-5 *jj3 jḫ p3jj.k dd ḥr.tw ndm wʿw r sš mj sdd.j n.k p3 sḫr wʿw* "What is it that you are reputed to say, 'The soldier's calling is pleasanter than the scribe's'? Come let me describe to you the condition of the soldier." Cf. *JEA* 56 pl. 46 r 2-3; Peas. B1, 46-48; pWestcar 12, 11, and for Late Egyptian pBM 10052, 8, 19-20; LES 45, 12; LES 58, 7; LES [64, 13]; LES 73,16 - 74,1; LRL 15, 9-10 ; LRL 32, 11-12; LRL 36, 12; LRL 67,16 - 68,1; RAD 56, 4.
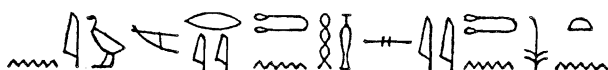
needs any more explanation). Again, A's refusal to allow B to respond puts B into a position of inferiority or embarrassment.

(9)   pBerlin 10025 r 5-6 (Scharff, *ZÄS* 59 [1924], pl. IV)

(j)n jw nb.j ꜥ.w.s.ḥr ḥḥ ntt r jr.t r b3k jm......(j)n jw.j qsn.kwj nb.j ꜥnḫ wḏ3 snb "Is my lord, LPH, seeking what will be done against this humble servant?" (I hope not).... "Am I in trouble, my lord, LPH?" (I hope not.)

(10)   Urk. I 205, 2

(j)n jw mrj.tn ḥsj tn nsw.t "Do you want the king to favour you?" (which in Egypt can only be answered "Of course!")[22]

In these cases, A is trying to make B agree with him.[23] It is difficult to draw the dividing line where these questions shade into questions where A has a preferred answer, such as "Is dinner ready?" but nonetheless leaves the outcome openended. I have left the latter out of consideration.[24]

These questions are sometimes designed to manoevre B into agreeing with a proposition which A sets up as entailed by the question, as if B was answering and supplying the missing middle term of the argument. This is a strong manipulative ploy,

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[22] Silverman, *Interrogative Constructions*, 18, ex.7; Amenemhat 2, 7-9; CT I 159 d-g; CT I 160g ff; CT I 168 d-169a ; CT I 239e; CT III 86e; Hekanakhte I v 17; Hekanakhte XVI r 9; Kenamun pl. 8, 3-4; Gardiner - Sethe, *Eg. Letters to the Dead* I, 8, II, 4, III, 3; Meir I pl. V; pLouvre 3230 v 2-3; Peas. B1, 18; Peas. B1, 95; Peas. B1, 103-104; Peas. B1, 106; Peas. B1, 135; Peas. B1, 225; Peas.B1, 282; Piankhy 6; Sin. B 115-116; Sin. B 120-121; Urk. I 129, 11-12; Urk. IV 650, 5; pWestcar 11, 10-12.

[23] Polotsky, *Collected Papers*, 135 asserts that the proposition to be contradicted is imputed to B. This is actually rather rare, mostly in miscellany texts promoting the advantages of the scribal career. Cf. also oGardiner 165 v 4-5 (*KRI* III 549, 8-10)

[24] Incidentally, wanting an answer of "no/nothing" to a question is *not* the same as not wanting the question to be answered at all. Peas. B1, 280-281 *ḫn.j ḫpr m3jr.j dr ḫft ḥr.k ptr ḏ3r.k* "My speech is done, my grief is all before you. What more do you want?" The Peasant does not want the answer "Nothing." He wants Rensi to rectify his complaint.

since interrogative syntax places powerful constraints on what can follow,[25] and the comment which follows a question is generally taken as its answer.
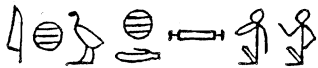
(11)   Urk. I 39,17 - 40,1
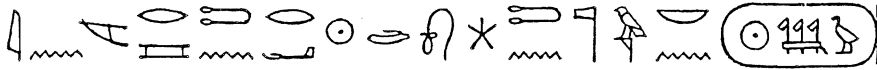
jn mrj.tn R' dw3.tn nṯr nb n S3ḥwr' "Will you love Re'? (Yes, so) you should worship every god for Sahure'".[26]

(12)   Hekanakhte II r 42-43

(j)n jw ḥm w' jm.tn r wḏd srḥ.w n.f ḥm.t.f jḥ wḏd.j "Is one of you patient when his wife has been denounced to him? (Certainly not!) Then I shall be patient."

I define rhetorical questions as questions which are either:

a) unanswerable – either by that particular hearer B or by people in general. B's response is zero (the answer is blocked by B.)

b) unanswered – A shows that he is not interested in hearing B's answer. B's response is zero (the answer is blocked by A.)

c) predetermined – have a preferred answer which A wants to elicit from B. B's response is already fixed by A.

Rhetorical questions do not elicit new information from B – however, they do elicit something from B, either a manipulated agreement with A, or a failure to answer, which causes B to lose face vis-a-vis A.

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[25] Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis*, 104.

[26] Pyr. 879 b-c *jn mrj.tn 'nḫ Tm wrḫ.tn mrḥ.t wnḫ.tn ḥbs* Will you want Atum to live? You should smear on oil, you should put on garments. LES 5, 7-8 *jn jw j-dj.j t3jj.j šrj.t n p3 w'r n Km.t jmj šm.t.f n.f 'n* Am I going to give my daughter *to the refugee from Egypt.*? Make him push off again!" Cf. CT I 15c-16a; CT II 118c-e; CT V 54c-55b; CT VI 316r-317a; Hekanakhte I v 17; Adm. 13, 3; Adm. 14, 13-14; pKahun 30, 8-13; Gardiner - Sethe, *Eg. Letters to the Dead* VI, 7-9; Erman, *Mutter und Kind*, 2, 1-3; *ibid.* 2, 8-9; Nu 29.2-3; Peas. B1, 146-147; Peas. B1, 148-150; Peas. B1, 311-313; Peas. B1, 322-323; Pyr. 685 a-b; Pyr. 893 a-b Pyr. 1224 b-c; Ti pl. CXI; pWestcar 11, 6-8, and for Late Egyptian pAnastasi V 10, 7-8; Anastasi IX r 7 (*KRI* III 505,15 - 506,1): *KRI* V 579, 4-5.

Rhetorical questions seem to be asked either when A already has power over B, or is trying to gain power over B by playing one-upmanship.[27] A gains power by manipulating B into giving the answer A wants, disregarding B's answer, or showing that B cannot answer A's questions – in every case, A *reverses* the normal preconditions of asking questions in a power play with B.

For these questions to have rhetorical force, the speaker must be aware of these conditions. It is possible to ask a question in good faith which in other contexts could be rhetorical.

(13) LES 45, 11-15
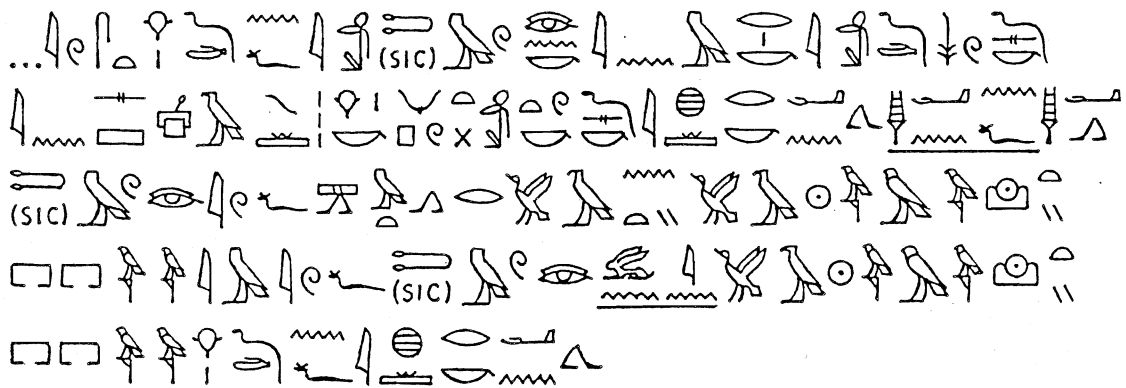
...*jw.s ḥr ḏd n.f j-rm n.k jn r.k j-ḏd sw ḏs.k jn šs3 ḥr.k wp.t.k ḏs.k jḥ r.k ʿn ʿḫʿ.n.f ʿḥʿ.Ø <ḥr> rmj jw.f <ḥr> šm.t r p3 ntjj P3-Rʿ Ḥrw3ḫ.tjj jm jw.f <ḥr> rmj wn.jn P3-Rʿ Ḥrw3ḫ.tjj ḥr ḏd n.f jḥ r.k ʿn* "And then she (Isis) said to him, 'Have a good cry! It was your very own mouth which said it. Your own skill has judged you. What's the matter with you?' And then he stood crying, and he went to where Preʿ-Harakhty was, crying, and then Preʿ-Harakhty said to him, 'What's the matter with you?'"

Isis, having tricked Seth, mocks him *jḥ r.k ʿn* "What do you want?" *jḥ r.k ʿn* "What do you want?" is subsequently used as an information question by Reʿ, in LES 45, 15, when Seth returns from his misadventures and explains the case to him. I think this is a very good example of rhetorical questions not being syntactically defined.

Having defined rhetorical questions pragmatically, let us move to their syntactic structure. Although statements and commands are known to elicit information, rhetorical questions have basically the syntactic structure of questions (rather than statements or commands.) The following forms are known in Classical and Old Egyptian[28]:

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[27] In cultures where by and large only superiors can ask questions of inferiors, the act of posing a question may in itself be a power play. Goody, in: *Questions and Politeness,* 17-43.

[28] I don't discuss Late Egyptian here, because I am replying to Junge's and Silverman's arguments.

$jn + jw + S + \underbar{h}r + $ infinitive[29]
$jn\ jw\ wnn + S + \underbar{h}r + $ infinitive[30]
$jn + jw + S + r + $ infinitive[31]
$jn\ jw + S + $ adverb[32]
$jw + S + $ interrogative adverb[33]
$jn\ jw + S + $ stative[34]
$jn\ wnn + S + $ stative[35]
$jn\ jw + $ nominal sentence[36]
$jn + $ nominal sentence[37]
$jn + $ participial statement[38]
$jn\ jw\ wn + $ noun[39]
$jn\ wn + $ noun[40]
$jn\ jr + $ noun equivalent[41]
Nominal sentence[42]
$jn + $ adjectival predicate $ + S$[43]

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[29] pBerlin 10025 r 4; Meir I pl. V; Peas. B1, 148-149.

[30] Urk. IV 650, 5.

[31] Peas.B1, 283.

[32] Adm. 12.5; Peas.B1, 3; Peas. B1, 95; Peas. B1, 302; Urk. I 129, 11 (subjectless!).

[33] Urk. IV 1344, 9.

[34] CT II 331d; Hekanakhte I v 17; Adm. 12, 5; pBerlin 10025 r 5; Sin. B 126.

[35] Gardiner - Sethe, *Eg. Letters to the Dead* I, 8.

[36] Lebensmüder 20; Erman, *Mutter und Kind* 2, 8-9; pLouvre 3230 v 2-3 (negative); pWestcar 8, 12-13.

[37] Adm. 14.13; Peas. B1, 19; Peas. B1, 103-4; Peas. B1, 311-313; Pyr. 685 a-b; Pyr. 1224 b-c; pWestcar 12, 11.

[38] Ti pl. 111.

[39] CT VII 163n; Sin. B 120-121; Sin. B 133-134.

[40] Pyr. 893 a-b.

[41] Hekanakhte XVI r 3-4; [XVI r 7]; Hekanakhte XVII r 10-11; Gardiner - Sethe, *Eg. Letters to the Dead* VI, 2-3.

[42] Peas. B1, 46-47; Silverman, *Interrogative Constructions*, 18, ex.7.

[43] Hekanakhte I v 2; Urk. I 129, 5.

jn + emphatic form[44]

jn jw + emphatic form[45]

jn nt pw stp.f[46]

Emphatic form (often with interrogative adverb)[47]

jn + prospective *stp.f*[48]

jn + *jw stp.n.f*[49]

jn jw n stp.n.f[50]

jn n stp.n.f[51]

jn wn n stp.n.f[52]

jn n stp.f[53]

jn + *jw stp.f*[54]

jn jw S + *stp.f*[55]

jn + passive *jw stp.w.f*[56]

ptr + noun/noun equivalent[57]

nm + noun/noun equivalent[58]

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[44] Silverman, *Interrogative Constructions*, 18, ex.7; CT I 159d-f; CT I 160g ff; CT I 168 d; CT IV 77f; CT V 54c; CT VI 316r-317c; Hassan, *Giza* II, fig. 219; Hekanakhte XVI r 9; Gardiner - Sethe, *Eg. Letters to the Dead* II, 4 , III, 3; Peas.B 1, 135; Ti pl. 124; Urk. I 129, 6-7; pWestcar 9, 14

[45] Kenamun pl. 8, 13-14; Erman, *Mutter und Kind* 2, 1-3; Nu 29, 2; Paheri pl. III.

[46] Sin. B 115-116.

[47] CT IV 77c; Peas. B1, 180 (negative); Sin. B1, 202.

[48] CT I 239e; Adm. 13, 3; Peas. B1, 8-9; *ibid.*, 225.

[49] pEbers 2 r 3-5; Piankhy 6.

[50] Piankhy 130-131.

[51] Pyr. 1954a.

[52] Gardiner - Sethe, *Eg. Letters to the Dead*, VI, 7-8.

[53] CT III 86e.

[54] Amenemhat 2, 7-9; Hekanakhte II r 42-43; Kamose 20-21.

[55] Peas. B1, 148, 149-150.

[56] pKahun 30, 8f.

[57] Hekanakhte II 43; Lebensmüder 32-33; Peas. B1, 280-281; Sin. B 122; Sin. B 183; pWestcar 11, 10-11.

[58] CT I 15c; Piankhy 15; Peas. B1, 168; Peas. B1, 106.

We find that most of these rhetorical questions are corroboration questions to be answered yes or no,[59] if at all. Specification questions, *wh*-questions,[60] are rare as rhetorical questions and even when they appear tend to expect the answer "nothing, nobody."[61]

This corroborates the findings of Groll for Late Egyptian that *wh*-questions, cleft sentences, are almost invariably intended to elicit information, whereas questions where the interrogative adverb or pronoun is not the predicate tend to be rhetorical.[62] This is predictable: the more open-ended specification questions give the hearer the opportunity to answer on his own terms whereas corroboration questions channel the hearer's reply into the direction which the speaker intends.

Junge notices that structures in CE with adverbial or pseudoverbal predicate are not introduced by *jn* as questions[63] (*jn + S + adverb/$\underline{h}r$ + infinitive/stative) and suggests that it is because they make statements which are AB events[64], plain to both hearer and speaker.[65] New information cannot be supplied or asked about such statements.[66]

(14)   Sh. S. 108 (The Sailor concludes the story of his adventures)

mk wj r-gs.k "Now here I am beside you."

(15)   Sin. B 257 (The king opens his speech to Sinuhe on the latter's return to Egypt.)
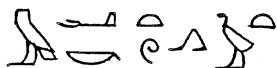
mk tw jw.t<j> "Well, you've arrived."

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[59] Gardiner, *EG*, § 490, §§ 491-494.

[60] *Ibid.*, § 490, §§ 495-303.

[61] Lebensmüder 32-33; Peas. B1, 280-281; Peas. B1, 168; Piankhy 15; Sin. B 122; Sin. B 183.

[62] Groll, in: *Studies Lichtheim*, 419-21.

[63] Junge, *BiOr* 40 (1983), 549.

[64] Labov, in: *Studies in Social Interaction*, 124.

[65] Junge, *BiOr* 40 (1983), 552.

[66] *Ibid.*, 553.

On the other hand, statements with *jw* + subject + adverbial predicate are A-events, known to the speaker but not to the hearer,[67] and thus questions about such statements are information-seeking questions and have the structure *jn* + *jw* + S + adverb, etc.[68]

(16)   pWestcar 11, 19-20

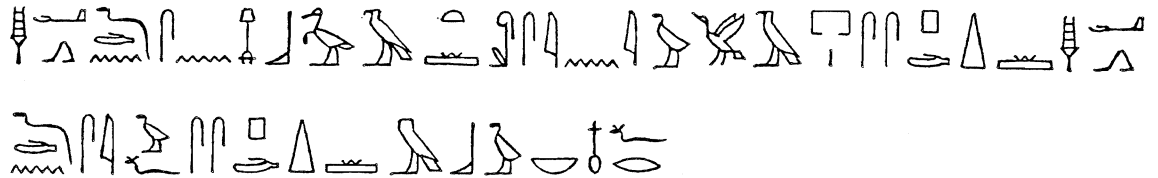*ꜥḥꜥ.n ḏd.n.s n wbꜣ.t.s jn jw pꜣ pr sspd ꜥḥꜥ.n ḏd.n.s jw.f sspd m bw nb nfr* "And then she said to her maidservant, 'Is the house prepared?' and then she said,'It is prepared with everything good'."

Junge suggests that questions which ask for confirmation[69] have the structure *jn* + S + adverbial predicate,[70] or *jn jw* + nominal sentence.[71] Those which cast doubt on a proposition have the structure *jn jw* + S + adverbial predicate,[72] *jn* + nominal sentence,[73] or sometimes *jn* + *jw* sentence. However, there are various objections to this argument. First of all, the sentence patterns introduced by *jn* are main sentences. The absence of questions with the structure *jn* + S + adverb may simply be because *jw* is needed as a main clause converter for the adverbial sentence and thus one would expect to see *jn-jw* + S + adverb. The examples Junge shows without *jw* have *mk*, which, as Johnson points out, is a *jw*-deletor.[74]

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[67] *Ibid.*, 554-555.

[68] *Ibid.*, 555.

[69] *Ibid.*, 558.

[70] *Ibid.*, 559; Erman, *Mutter und Kind* 2, 8-9; pLouvre 3230 (*JEA* 12 pl. 18) v 2-3 (negative); Pyr. 685a-b; Pyr. 1224 b-c; pWestcar 8, 2-3.

[71] Junge, *BiOr* 40 (1983), 558-559.

[72] *jn* + *jw* + S + *ḥr* + infinitive pBerlin 10025 r 4; Peas. B1, 148-149. *jn* + *jw* + S + *r* + infinitive Peas. B 282. *jn jw wnn* S + *ḥr* + infinitive Urk. IV 650, 5. *jn* + *jw* + S + stative pBerlin 10025 r 5; Hekanakhte I v 17; Sin. B 126. *jn jw* + S + adverb Peas. B1, 5; Peas. B 1, 95; Peas. B1, 303; Urk. I 129, 11.

[73] *jn* + nominal sentence Peas. B1, 103-4.

[74] Johnson, in: *Festschrift Westendorf*, 80.

Secondly, it is not clear that S + adverb structures are necessarily AB-events. Junge's examples are AB events because they have a second person subject/adverb. If they had a third person subject the same might not necessarily be true.[75] Even some examples of this structure with second person subject express information which is pragmatically new.

(17)   Sin. B 77 (Amunenshi contradicts Sinuhe's propaganda of Egyptian superiority)

"It's great for Egypt that he (the king) is doing well (but.......)

mk tw ʿ3 wnn.k ḥnʿ.j nfr jr.t.j n.k "Look, you're here, you're going to be with me, and what I shall do for you is good!"

Here, I would argue, although "you're here" is semantically obvious, it is very far from Sinuhe's mind (pragmatically new) and Amunenshi plainly feels his guest needs a salutary reminder.[76]

Thirdly, if *jw* marks AB-events, how come that questions with *jn + jw* mark questions with adverbial predicates which expect the answer no, and questions with nominal predicates which expect the answer yes? (as Junge himself points out that the distinction is not significant, since both *jw* and *jn-jw* alternate in Coffin Text variants of the same texts.[77] Moreover, why does this useful distinction not exist anywhere else – say, for corroboration questions with verbal predicates?

Finally, there are instances with the exact opposite of the structures suggested by Junge. There are questions asking for confirmation which have the structure: *jn* + nominal sentence[78], *jn jw* + S + adverbial predicate[79], and there are dubitative questions which have the structure *jn jw* + nominal sentence[80], *jn* + S + adverbial predicate.[81]

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[75] For example, I am not sure that Rawoser in pWestcar 11, 5 does know at that point that he is the proud father of triplets. One can also invent contexts where Junge's impossible questions "Did you come?" "Are you here?" would be plausible – if asked by a blind man, for example, or by tomb-robbers blundering round the necropolis in the dark. (However, the Egyptians might have phrased these questions differently and used a different sentence pattern, because the information would be known to the hearer, not to the speaker. It would be a B-event, not an AB-event).

[76] Cf. Derchain, *GM* 87 (1985), 7-8.

[77] Junge, *BiOr* 40 (1983), 558-559.

[78] *jn* + nominal sentence Adm. 14, 13; Peas. B1, 19; Peas. B1, 311-313; Pyr. 685 a-b.

[79] *jn jw* + S + *ḥr* + infinitive Meir I pl. V. *jn jw* + S + stative CT V 102 c-f. *jn jw* + S + adverb Adm. 14, 13. Note that in Late Egyptian, where *jw* has become a fossilized part of the verb form, as in the third future, *jn jw* may mark both dubitative and presumptive questions LES 75, 11-12 *jn jw.t <r> dj.t šsp.w n*

I agree with Silverman[82] that rhetorical questions for corroboration do not have a specific syntactic structure of their own. Sometimes rhetorical questions are marked by particles such as *rf, rr* or *tr*[83], like "really" in English, but this is not always so.

I disagree with Junge that rhetorical questions are limited to AB-events. In this case, one would be able to set up a hierarchy of rhetorical possibility, where questions with first person subject are most likely to be rhetorical since most of them are AB-events or A-events.[84] On the other hand, third person questions would be most likely to be information questions, since they deal with a vast range of subjects about which A knows nothing.

What actually happens is that most rhetorical questions tend to have primarily *second* and *third* person subjects because they represent A's viewpoint of B's behaviour and the rest of the world which he is trying to impose upon B. First person subjects are fairly rare (about 20% of the total).[85]

So why does not A simply state what he wants? The answer is that interrogative syntax imposes very strong constraints on what follows it, and the comment which follows a question is usually taken as its answer. Optimally, A manoeuvres B into confirming his assertion, and, at the worst, sets B up to lose an argument.

ḫ3t.j r ḫbd.j "Will you let them receive me in order to kill me?" and LES 75, 14-16 *jn bn jw p3jj.s nb <r> gm 10 n js.wt m-dj.t jw.f ḫdb.w gr ntf* "Won't their lord find ten crews of your and kill them in turn?"

[80] *jn jw* + nominal sentence Lebensmüder 19-20; Piankhy stela 31. *jn jw wn* + noun Sin. B 120-121; Sin. B 133-134.

[81] *jn* + *wnn* + S + stative Hekanakhte XVI v 1; L to D 1.8.

[82] Silverman, *Interrogative Constructions*, 98.

[83] *Ibid.*, 88-98. During the discussion of this paper, it was pointed out that marking rhetorical questions with particles may make them more recognizable and thus less manipulative. In fact, many of the examples with particles seem geared to embarrassing their hearer, such as *JEA* 56 pl. 46, 2-3; Kadesh Poem 92, 218-219, 253-254; Peas. B1, 18, Peas. B1, 224, and thus are manipulative in the extreme.

[84] B-events with first person subject are topics which the speaker checks out with a hearer who can see A's appearance ("Do I have lipstick on my teeth?") has foreknowledge of A's future ("Is it I who will betray you?") or can provide an alternative interpretation of A's behaviour ("Did I hurt you when I said X?").

[85] Rhetorical questions with first person subject seem to have a slight but not necessarily significant preference for presupposed negative answers. Negative answer: Allen, *Handbook,* 28; CT II 95g; CT III 86e; Hekanakhte II 43-4; Paheri pl. III; Peas. B1, 224; Sin. B 115-116, and in Late Egyptian pBologna 1094 10, 1; pLeiden I 365 r 4-5 (*KRI* III 232, 15) ; LES 5, 7-8; LES 54, 3-4; LES 68, 7-8; LRL 1, 9-10; LRL 32, 11-12; RAD 56, 4. Positive answer: Allen, *Handbook,* 28; CT I 239d-e; CT VII 163m-n; *JEA* 12 pl. 17 verso 2-3; Kadesh Poem 95, 98, 175, 258-259, and in Late Egyptian pAnastasi V 26, 3-4; pBologna 1094 10, 1; LES 14, 6; LES 38, 6.

In conclusion, rhetorical questions are defined by the speaker's intention of manipulating their hearer into agreeing with him and/or losing face.[86] Rhetorical questions for corroboration are not associated with any specific syntactic structure, although they are often marked by particles. Questions for specification are rare as rhetorical questions, probably because the information gap they offer is too wide for A to be able to control what B says. Indirect requests or speaker-answered questions do not offer B the information gap as a legitimate possibility. Rhetorical questions *exploit* the information gap, offering B the illusion of choice.

The match between perlocution and syntax does not seem to be particularly fortunate. Syntax has not been unduly responsive to the matchmaker's enthusiasm. It remains to be seen whether this couple are genuinely incompatiable or whether some other approach at matchmaking can bring them happily to the marital canopy.

Reconstructing the links between speaker and hearer in ancient texts inevitably involves a degree of what might be charitably called educated imagination (and uncharitably termed projection), and our individual interpretations may differ widely from each other.[87]

I wrote this paper as an experiment, a departure from my normal structuralist approach, to see whether starting out from a purely pragmatic viewpoint would give interesting results for Egyptian linguistics. In the end my results are negative; I don't think we can say anything about the syntax of rhetorical questions. I suspect that the syntactic form of rhetorical questions is dictated not by their force as speech acts but by their verbal and non-verbal constituents.

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[86] The hearer's assertiveness, or failure to spot the speaker's intention in the absence of syntactic indicators account for many pragmatic failures of rhetorical questions in real life.

[87] This was particularly marked in a discussion of Hekanakhte XVI v 1 *jn wnn jb.j mḥ r-ḏd rdj.n.j ˁq.w n pr.j* "Is my heart sure that I have given provisions to my house?" which Junge read as a confirmation question, "Can't my heart be sure......?" and I read as a dubitative question,"Can my heart actually be sure.......?"

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