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On Particles in Middle Egyptian

ON PARTICLES IN MIDDLE EGYPTIAN

Thomas Ritter

The Middle Egyptian particles have hitherto never been integrated as a whole into a unified syntactic, pragmatic, and semantic theoretical framework. All the egyptological treatises dealing with the problems of particles focus only on one or two of them, leaving aside the others. The most comprehensive approach is offered by M.A. Collier who demonstrates that several particles, which have always been considered to differ syntactically from one another, can really be explained in an analogous way.[1] The analyses that have been put forth can be roughly divided into two groups:

(1)   The particle is part of the minimal sentence, an Intra-Clausal Constituent which functions as the Theme[2] of this sentence.[3]

(2)   The particle stands outside of the minimal sentence itself, it is an Extra-Clausal Constituent.[4]

The most controversially treated particle is *iw*. Therefore, it shall serve here as the point of departure for the following considerations.

According to the protagonists of group (1), the particle *iw* is a substantive functioning as the Theme of the sentence. What are the criteria that a word or a phrase has to meet in order to be eligible for themehood? This is a question that points far beyond the limits of the Egyptian language, since the immediate sentence constituents Theme and Rheme (pragmatic

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1   M. A. Collier, "Circumstantially adverbial? The circumstantial *sḏm(.f)/sḏm.n(.f)* reconsidered," in S.J. Quirke (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, New Malden 1991, 21-50.

2   For a definition of the term "Theme" cf. Th. Ritter, *Das Verbalsystem der königlichen und privaten Inschriften der 18. Dynastie bis einschließlich Amenophis III*, Diss. Tübingen/Los Angeles 1992, Teil I, § 1.1.9.

3   See primarily F. Junge, *Syntax der mitteluagyptischen Literatursprache. Grundlagen einer Strukturtheorie*, Mainz 1978; id., "Der Gebrauch von *jw* im mittelägyptischen Satz," in M. Görg (Hg.), *Festschrift Elmar Edel*. ÄAT I, Wiesbaden 1979, 263-71; id., *"Emphasis" and Sentential Meaning in Middle Egyptian*. GOF /IV20, Wiesbaden 1989, who systematizes the observations and suggestions of H.J. Polotsky, "The 'Emphatic' *sḏm.n.f* Form," *RdÉ* 11 (1957), 109-17; id., "Egyptian Tenses," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2/5, Jerusalem 1965; id., "Les transpositions du verbe en égyptien classique," *IOS* 6 (1976), 1-50.

4   See, e. g., J.B. Callender, "Grammatical Models and 'Middle Egyptian'," *JEA* 69 (1983), 158; J.H. Johnson, "The Use of the Particle *mk* in MK-Letters", in *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens. Festschrift Wolfhart Westendorf*, Göttingen 1984, 71-85; H. Satzinger, "Schwierigkeiten mit einer Syntax ohne Verbalsatz," in *ZDMG Supplement VI*, Stuttgart 1985, 76-79; P. Vernus, *Future at Issue. Tense, Mood and Aspect in Middle Egyptian: Studies in Syntax and semantics*. YES 4, New Haven 1990, 67, 88, 103, 174; M.A. Collier, *A Grammatical Analysis of Sentences with iw in Middle Egyptian*, Diss. London 1989; id., "The circumstantial *sḏm(.f)/sḏm.n(.f)* as verbal verb-forms in Middle Egyptian," *JEA* 76 (1990), 73-85; id., in *Middle Kingdom Studies*; id., "The Relative Clause and the Verb in Middle Egyptian," *JEA* 77 (1991), 23-42.

dimension), Subject and Predicate (syntactic dimension), and Agent and Action (semantic dimension) are language universals, i.e., categories that are shared by all natural languages, whether dead or living, and that have the same function and definition in all natural languages.[5] Therefore, the question about the criteria of themehood and whether or not a particle like *iw* is capable of assuming the function of the sentence theme at all can be answered from a general linguistic much rather than from a purely egyptological point of view.

In General Linguistics, a number of requirements have been discovered that a word or phrase has to meet in order to be able to fill the position of the Theme of a sentence.[6]

THE THEME OF A SENTENCE
1. *has to have* a referent in some world;[7]
2. tends to be the most given item in the sentence;
3. tends to be the highest-ranking sentence constituent in the following hierarchies:[8]
   a) Person: first, second > third
   b) NP type: pronoun > proper name > common noun
   c) Animacy: human > animate > inanimate
   d) Definiteness: definite > referential > nonreferential (nonspecific)

The hierarchies a, b, and c can be combined into a hierarchy that is commonly known as the animacy hierarchy.[9]

ANIMACY:
first, second person pronouns > third person pronoun > proper names >
human common noun > nonhuman animate common noun > inanimate common noun.

The animacy and definiteness hierarchy, in turn, are related for the following reasons:[10] The animacy hierarchy actually consists of three hierarchies, person, NP type and animacy proper. The first and second person pronouns are at the "top" of the combined hierarchy, because they are by definition human and pronominal. The first and second person pronouns are also definite by definition. Thus, definiteness should be added to the person, NP type and animacy proper hierarchies, since it is equally closely related to the personal pronouns.

The Theme of a sentence is under normal circumstances the (referential) NP that occupies the highest rank in all of these hierarchies. This principle can be violated if, and

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5   On universals see, e. g., W. Croft, *Typology and Universals*, Cambridge 1990.
6   For a more detailed discussion of the Functional Sentence Perspective with the relevant general linguistic literature cf. Ritter (1992:Teil I, § 1.1.9).
7   Cf. S.C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar. Part I: The Structure of the Clause*. Functional Grammar Series 9, Dordrecht 1989, 60, 111f.; T. Givón, *Syntax. A Functional-Typological Introduction. Vol.1*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 1990, 569.
8   On hierarchies cf. Croft (1990:95-123, 127).
9   Croft (1990:112).
10 Croft (1990:127).

only if there is a strong pragmatic motivation to assign thematic function to an "inferior" constituent, e.g., in the case of setting a contrastive focus.[11]

From the conditions enumerated above it becomes immediately obvious that the Standard Theory interpretation of a particle as the Theme of a sentence is impossible for general linguistic reasons, because a particle

1. never has a referent,
2. is lowest on all of the above hierarchies, in other words, any other constituent of the sentence is more likely to function as its Theme.

Since the interpretation of particles as sentence Themes is to be ruled out, the question arises: What are they in terms of Syntax, Pragmatics, and Semantics?

SYNTAX

An excellent syntactic interpretation is offered by a specific branch of transformational grammar called X-bar Theory.[12] This syntactic theory distinguishes intermediary levels between the word and phrase levels, between the phrase and sentence levels, and between the sentence and clause levels.

Every clause, e.g., has the status of an S-bar constituent, i.e., it consists of a C o m - p l e m e n t i s e r (C) and a Sentence (S):

$$S' \rightarrow C\ S^{13}$$

The C constituent

> may be either f i l l e d (e. g. by an overt complementiser[14] or an inverted Auxiliary) or left e m p t y.[15]

It has to be pointed out that this is a universal formula which is not bound to either an individual language or a specific sentence type.

This analysis yields the following structure:

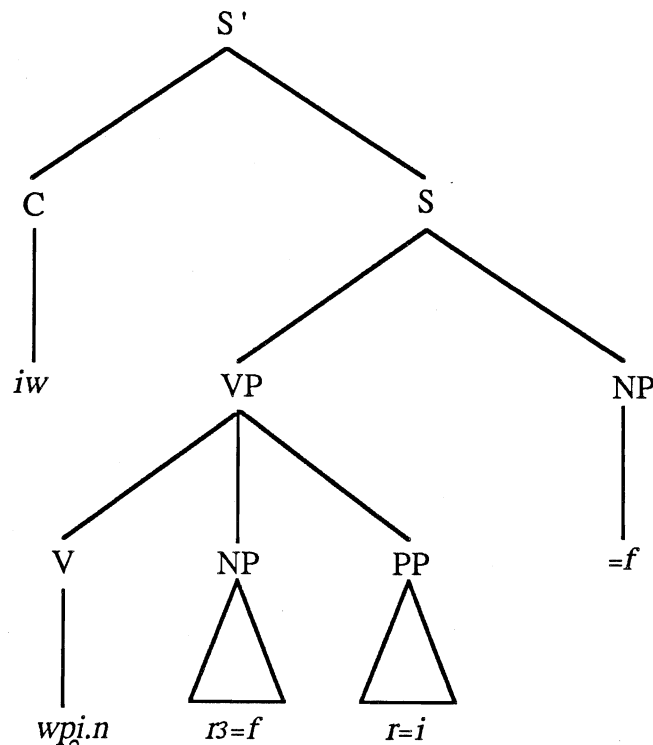11 On "Focus" see Ritter (1992:Teil I, § 1.1.9.2).
12 Cf., e. g., A. Radford, *Transformational Grammar. A First Course*, Cambridge 1988.
13 Radford (1988:134). The suggestions made by Satzinger (1985), Vernus (1990), and Collier (1990) are very close to this analysis.
14 I.e., a particle.
15 Radford (1988:301).

Ex. (1)   Sh.S. 67:

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                        S '
                       /    \
                      /      \
                     C        S
                     |       /  \
                     |      /    \
                    iw    VP      NP
                         /|\       |
                        / | \      |
                       V  NP  PP   =f
                       |  /\  /\
                       | /  \/  \
                     wpi.n r3=f  r=i
```

Since *iw* serves as a Complementiser, an Extra-Clausal Constituent, the Theme of the sentence has to be sought somewhere within the confines of the sentence proper, i.e., under the S node of the tree structure. As only NPs can assume thematic functions, there are but two candidates in this example that are theoretically eligible for themehood, *=f* and *r3=f*. The latter, however, is a complement of the verb, in other words, it is part of the predication of the sentence. Therefore it cannot function as the Theme. The other candidate, *=f*, is not a complement but a head itself. Furthermore, it is higher on the scales of animacy, definiteness, and givenness than *r3=f*. All these arguments make the Subject *=f* the only constituent that can function as the Theme. This is an example in which the Subject and the Theme of the sentence coincide. It cannot be stressed enough, however, that this is by no means always the case. The (syntactic) Subject and the (pragmatic) Theme of the sentence are separate entities that have to be kept apart in the analysis, despite Junge's attempt to declare them identical.[16] The following example shows a typical case in which Subject and Theme do not coincide.

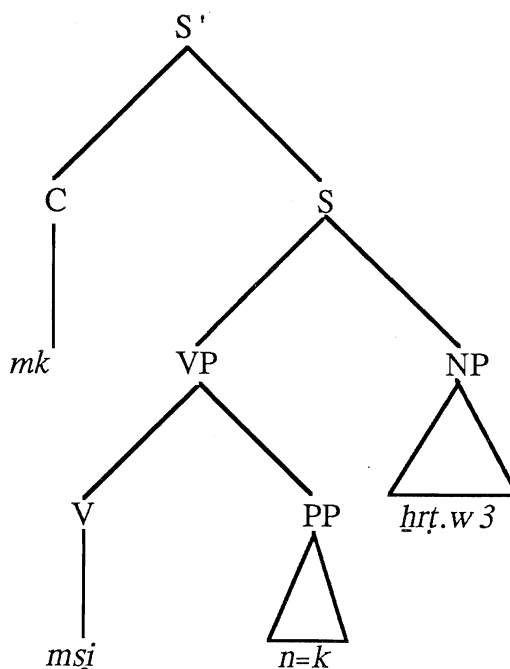16   Junge (1989:45-79, esp. 66ff.).

Ex. (2)   CT VI 302g:[17]
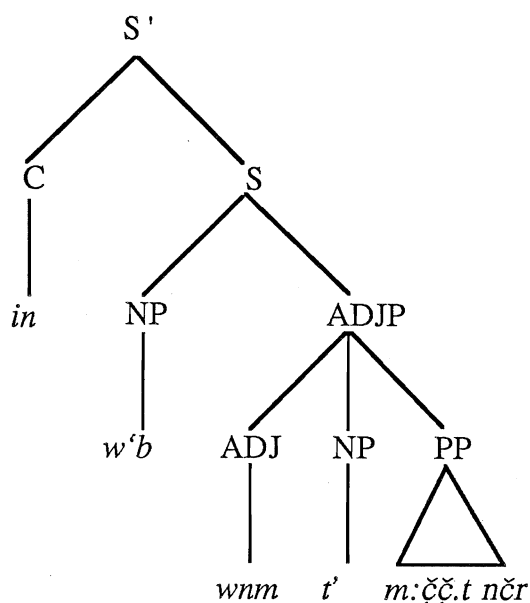
In this Cleft Sentence, the NP *w'b* is the (syntactic) Subject, whereas the (pragmatic) Theme is formed by the ADJP *wnm t' m:č̌č̌.t nč̌r*.
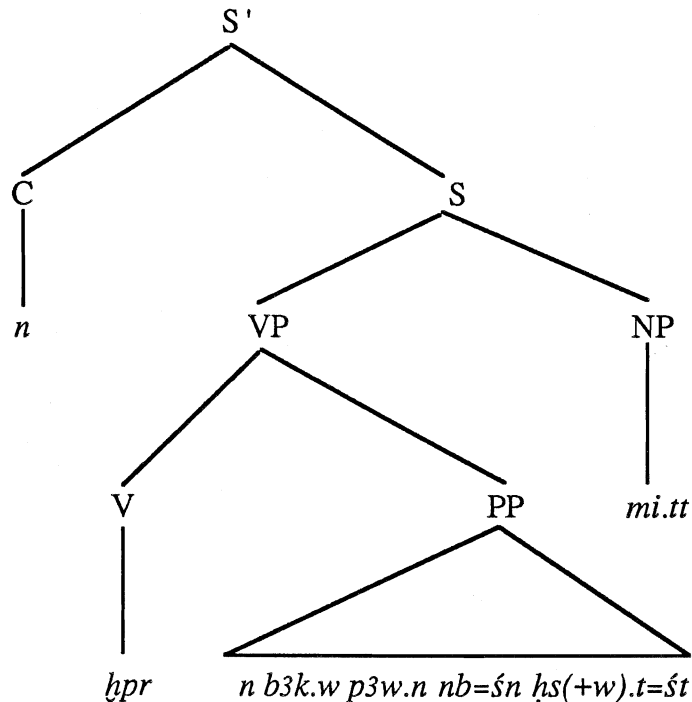
Ex. (3)   Westcar 11, 5-6:

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17 Cf. É. Doret,"Cleft-sentence, substitutions et contraintes sémantiques en Égyptien de la première phase (V[e]-XVIII[e] Dynastie)," *LingAeg* 1 (1991), 73.

The (pragmatic) Theme in this example coincides with the (syntactic) Subject and (semantic) Patient: *ẖrṯ.w 3*. This is the only NP in the sentence, Since the particle *mk* functions as a Complementiser, in other words, an Extra-Clausal Constituent.

Ex. (4)   Urk. VII 30, 12-13


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                          S'
                 ┌────────────────┐
                 C                 S
                 │         ┌──────────────┐
                 n        VP              NP
                      ┌─────────┐          │
                      V         PP       mi.tt
                      │      ┌─────────┐
                     ḫpr    n b3k.w p3w.n nb=śn ḥs(+w).t=śt
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In terms of the syntax, the negation *n* fulfills the same function as *iw, in,* and *mk* in the previous examples. The only NP in this sentence is *mi.tt*, which serves as the Theme.

PRAGMATICS AND SEMANTICS

After having explained the syntactic function of the particles as Complementisers, the question arises as to what the pragmatic and semantic functions are. S.C. Dik calls them Proposition operators and gives the following definition:[18]

> Proposition operators: these are operators capturing the grammatical means by which the speaker can express his personal evaluation of or attitude towards the propositional content.
>
> Proposition operators capture the grammatical means through Which S can specify his attitude towards the propositional content (Hengeveld 1988). This attitude may concern S's personal assessment of, or his personal commitment to the propositional content of X_i, or it may give an indication of the kind of evidence that S has to warrant the correctness of the propositional content.

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18   Dik (1989:59, 251).

In Egyptian, there are at least five different groups of Extra-Clausal Constituents.
1. ECCs indicating the commitment of the speaker to the truth value of the proposition, as described by S.C. Dik.
2. ECCs indicating the text relation.[19]
3. ECCs acting as tense converters.
4. ECCs indicating background/foreground.
5. ECCs indicating the pragmatic function of a constituent.

1. ECCs indicating the commitment of the speaker to the truth value of the proposition
a) The speaker assigns the truth value "true" to the proposition and assures the addressee of the truth: *iw.*
b) The speaker assigns the truth value "false" to the proposition: *n, nn, n-sp.*
c) The speaker expresses uncertainty as to the truth value of the proposition: *śmwn.*
d) The speaker inquires about the truth value of the proposition: *in, in-iw.*
e) The speaker wishes the proposition to be true: *iḥ, ḥꜣ.*

Ex. (5)   Urk.VII 2, 8-9

ḥꜣ.ti-ꜥ(.w) im(.i)-rꜣ ḥm(.w) nčr Sꜣ-rnp.wt čṭ<=f>
→ *iw iri̯.n(=i) is m ḥs(+w).t nsw*
"The governor, the overseer of the priests, Sarenput, says: 'I built a tomb in the favour of the king'."

Ex. (6)   *Ṭwꜣ-Ḥty*, oGenf 12551, vs. 2
→ *n mꜣꜣ.n=i iꜣw.t r mi.tt=śt r čṭ.wt čꜣs.w pn im=f*
"I don't see any office like it with which this paragraph could deal."

Ex. (7)   Sin. B 157f.
→ *śmwn=k r rči̯.t mꜣ=i bw wrš ib=i im*
"Maybe you will let me see the place where my heart stays."

Ex. (8)   Instruction of Amenemhet I, pSallier II, 4-6
→ *in-iw pꜣw.n ḥm.wt čs śk.w*
→ *in-iw šṭi̯.tw ḫnn.w m ḫn+w*
→ *in-iw wbꜣ.tw mw ꜥṭṭ gbb.w*
→ *in-iw śḫꜣ.tw nčś.w ḥr iri̯.yt=śn*
"Have women (ever) levied troops?
Is the trouble maker raised in the residence?
Is the water allowed to flow freely that destroys the fields?
Are the simple people (ever) remembered for what they do?"

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19 For a definition and explanation of text relations, cf. Ritter (1992:Teil I, § 3.3).

Ex. (9)   Merikare P XLVIII, 9

→ *iḫ pḥ=k wi   nn ś:rḫ.y=k*

"May you come to me without someone who impeaches you."

2. ECCs indicating the text relation
a) Posterior text relation: *ꜥḥꜥ.n.*
b) Circumstantial text relation: *m, iw*[20]*, ti, śk*[21].
c) Anterior text relation: *m-ḫt, m-ś3.*
d) Contingent text relation: *ḫr, k3.*[22]
e) Causal text relation: *ḫr/r/čr n.tt, ḫr, n, n-ꜥ3.t-n.t, n-wr-n.*
f) Final text relation: *r, n-mrw.t.*
g) Relative text relation: *n.ti, iw.ti.*
h) Conditional text relation: *ir, m, mi.*

Ex. (10)   Neferti 12-16

      čt.in Ḥm=f ꜥ.w.ś
      mi m-ꜥ(.w)=(i) Nfr.ti ḫnmś=i
      čt=k n=i nhi n(.i) mtw.t nfr.t č3s.w śtp.w č3j.y ḫr n(.i) Ḥm=i n śčm=śt
      čt.in ḫr(.i)-ḫ3b(.t) Nfr.ti
      in-iw m ḫpr.wt in-iw m ḫpr.ti={f}śi itj.y ꜥ.w.ś. nb=[i]
      čt.in Ḥm=f ꜥ.w.ś.
      m ḫpr.ti=śt śwt min iś ḫpr [...]f
→ *ꜥḥꜥ.n twn.n=f r hn n(.i) ḫr.t-ꜥ(.w)*
→ *ꜥḥꜥ.n štj.n=f n=f šft ḥnꜥ mś.ti*

"Then H.M., l.p.h., said:
'Come to me, Neferti, my friend,
and tell me some nice things, some select stories, so that M.M. delights in hearing them.'
Then the lector-priest Neferti said:
'About things that did happen, or about things that are going to happen, sovereign, l.p.h., my lord?'
Then H.M., l.p.h., said:
'About things that are going to happen, because today has happened [...].'
Then he reached for a box with writing utensils,
and then he took a papyrus and a palette."

Ex. (11)   Sh.S. 32f.

čꜥ pri(.w)
→ *iw=n m w3č-wr*
"A storm came while we were at sea."

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20 Late Egyptian circumstantial converter.
21 Old Egyptian circumstantial converter.
22 Cf. L. Depuydt, "The Contingent Tenses of Egyptian," *Or* 58 (1989), 1-27.

Ex. (12)   Westcar 9-12

š3s pw iri̯.n=f m ḫnt ḫty.t r čči-Śnfr.w m3ʿ-ḥr+w

→ *ḥr-m-ḫt n3 n(.i) ʿḥ̆ʿ.w mini(.w) r mry.t*

š3s pw iri̯.n=f m ḥr.ti

"He sailed southward to Djedji-Snofru.

After the ships had moored at the river bank, he travelled over land."

Ex. (13)   Westcar 24-26

    ʿḥ̆ʿ.n čt.n Rwč̆-čt̆.t

    h3i̯ ini̯ im=f

→ *k3 in Rʿ(.w)-wśr(.w) rči̯=f n=śn čb3 ir.i m-ḫt iwi̯=f*

"Then Rudj-djedet said:

'Go down and bring (some) of it.

Raweser will then pay them after he has returned'."

Ex. (14)   Peas. B1, 59-64

nn tp=k čw.t n.t itr.w

nn m3=k ḥr śnč

iwi̯.n=k rm.w šny.w

ph=k m 3p<t.w> čt̆3

→ *ḥr n.tt ntk iti n(.i) nmḥ hi n ḫ3r.t sn n wč̆ʿ.t šnty.t n.t iw.ti-mw.t=f*

"You shall not taste the evils of the river;

you shall not see the face of fear;

the shy fish shall come to you,

and you shall catch fat fowl,

because you are a father to the orphan, a husband to the widow,

a brother to the divorced woman, a kilt to the motherless."

Ex. (15)   Urk.I 147, 4-6

ḥr iri̯.n(=i) nw

→ *n-mrw[.t] m33(=i) č̆ʿw pn rʿ(.w) nb*

→ *n-mrw.t wnn(=i) ḥnʿ=f m ś.t wʿ(+w).t*

"Moreover, I did this

in order to see this Djaw every day,

and in order to be with him in one place."

Ex. (16)   Sin. B 32-34

čt̆.n=f nn

    rḫ.n=f kt̆=i śč̆m.n=f śś3=i

    mtr.n wi rmč̆.w Km.t

→ *n.tiw im ḥnʿ=f*

"He said this,

because he knew my character, and had heard of my skills,

and because the Egyptians had testified in my favour who were there with him."

Ex. (17)   Pt. 507-508
→ *ir śčm=k nn čt.n=i n=k*
wnn śḫr=k nb r ḥ3.t
"If you listen to what I have told you,
all your plans will make progress."

3. ECCs acting as tense converters
a) Past tense converter: *wn*
b) Future tense converter: *wnn*

Ex. (18)   Sinai 90, 8[23]
→ *wn=i wšṭ=i ḥm.wt ḥr=ś*
"I kept on addressing the workmen concerning it."

Ex. (19)   Neferti C25224, 10-11
→ *wnn=f m p.t mi Iꜥḥ*
     nn tḫi nw=f n.w šś3
→ *wnn iś śtw=f m ḥr mi sp=f im.iw-ḥ3.t*
"He will be in the sky like the moon;
his nighttime will not be transgressed.
His rays will be in the faces as it used to be under the ancestors."

4. ECCs indicating background/foreground
a) indicating a foreground level above the unmarked foreground constructions: *mk.*
b) indicating a background level in narrative texts that is vital for the understanding of the
discourse: *iśč.*

Ex. (20)   Sin. B, 180-1
     wč-nsw n šmś+w S3-n(.i)-nh.t
→ *mk ini.tw n=k wč pn n(.i) nsw*
     r rči.t rḫ=k n.tt
"Royal Order to the subject Sinuhe:
See, this order has been brought to you
 in order to let you know that..."

Ex. (21)   Peasant R 71-74
→ *iśt r-f čt.n śḫ.ti pn mtw.t tn m rk Ḥm n(.i) nsw bi.ti Nb-k3.w-Rꜥ(.w) m3ꜥ-ḫrw*
     šm.t pw iri.n im(.i)-r3 pr(.w) wr Mrw-s3 Rnśi tp-m Ḥm=f čt=f
"Well, this peasant held this speech during the reign of the majesty of the late king Neb-
kaw-re.
Then the High Steward Meru's son Rensi came to the king and said..."

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23   A.H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, Oxford [3]1957, § 474.

The sentence introduced by *iśt* is preceded by the direct speech of the peasant and followed by a new step in the narrative. It contains information about the temporal setting of the story. It does not contribute to the evolvement of the plot itself; insofar it is part of the background. Nonetheless, it is important for the understanding or full appreciation of the discourse. Therefore, *iśt* can be said to introduce an intermediary background level between the merely illustrative background and the foreground of the narrative. It is typically followed by sentences containing information about the temporal or spatial setting, the dramatis personae, or an important event told out of sequence.

5. ECCs indicating the pragmatic function of a constituent
a)   assigning the function of Topic: *ir.*
b)   assigning the function of Focus: *in.*

Ex. (22)   Urk.VII 53, 9-13
→   *ir rmč.t nb.t sḫ3(+w) nb rḫ-iḫ.wt nb nčś nb tw3 nb*
      iri.ti=śn šṯi ḫr(+w) m is pn ḫč.ti=śn sḫ3(+w)=f nśś.ti=śn n ḫn.ti=f
      ḫr=ś[n] n ṯnč n(.i) čḥ(+w).ti śpṭ wn im.i nčr.w
"As for each person, each scribe, each scholar, each commoner, each poor person, who
      will make mischief in this tomb, who will damage its inscriptions, who will damage its
      statues,
they shall fall by the wrath of Thoth, the learned one who is among the gods."

Ex. (23)   CT V 338c, B₁Bo²⁴
→   *in N pn šṭ św m ʿ.wt Ḥw*
"It is N who pulled it [= the barge] with the limbs of *Ḥw.*"

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24   Doret (1991:65).