MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION NATIONALE, DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE

BULLETIN
DE L'INSTITUT FRANÇAIS
D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE

en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne

BIFAO 97 (1997), p. 157-163

Ola El-Aguizy

The Particule [ka] and other Related Problematic Passages in Papyrus Westcar.

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The particle *kꜣ* and other related problematic passages in Papyrus Westcar

Ola EL-AGUIZY

IT IS WELL KNOWN that the verbal forms *kꜣ sḏm.f, kꜣ.f sḏm.f* and *sḏm.kꜣ.f* express contingent future i.e. depending on a preceding implied or expressed condition.[1] The particle *kꜣ* used independently also expresses future contingency: "then". The expression *kꜣ.f*, derived from the construction *sḏm. kꜣ.f*, means "he will say" i.e. to say in the future. The etymology of this particle has generally been considered to be the 3ae inf. verb *kꜣj* meaning to "think about" "to devise, to plan" "to worry about" "to consider".[2] According to Vernus,[3] the origin of this particle is a verb *kꜣ* meaning "to say", which is not only used in the Late Egyptian language, but also in the Old Egyptian and the Coffin Texts: *kꜣ.sn nṯrw r N pn* (Var. *kꜣ.sn r.k*) "So shall the gods say to N" (var. to you).[4] Thus, it still means to say in the future.

The fact that a verb in itself expresses a particular tense would probably mean that it is related one way or another with an etymology related to that tense. Thus, the meanings of the verb *kꜣj* would agree with this theory since we plan or think of an action before accomplishing it, while the action is not yet accomplished. Therefore, if the verb *kꜣ* means "to say" in the future, as Vernus says, that means that even when it was first used in this sense, it had to be derived from the verb *kꜣj* "to think about etc.".[5]

Gardiner believes that the verbal constructions *sḏm.ḥr.f, sḏm.kꜣ.f* and *sḏm.in.f* should have originally been derived from verbs meaning consecutively: "to cry, to plan" and "to say" and that the constructions themselves could be interpreted as "heard cries he", "heard plans he" and "heard said he".[6]

1 L. DEPUYT, *Conjunction, Contiguity, Contingency*, Oxford, 1993, p. 234; A.H. GARDINER, *Egyptian Grammar*, § 242, 434; P. Vernus, *Future at Issue, Tense, Mood, Aspect in Middle Egyptian, Studies in Syntax and Semantics*, New Haven, 1990, pp. 85-99; A. LOPRIENO, *Ancient Egyptian, a Linguistic Introduction*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 122, Chap. 5.6.

2 For the verb *kꜣj* "to think", see *Wb* V, 83; A.H. GARDINER, *op. cit.*, p. 181, § 242, 437; B. MATHIEU, P. GRANDET, *Cours d'Égyptien hiéroglyphique*, Khéops, 1990, p. 262.

3 P. VERNUS, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86, n. 7.

4 A. DE BUCK, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts* I, 94, Spell 30c; R.O. FAULKNER, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* I, p. 19.

5 The compound verb *kꜣj-ib* also means the thinking of the heart, the planning of the heart, see *Wb* V, 84,3 and *Urk*. IV, 390, 400, 406, 637 and 932; *kꜣ* being used as noun *kꜣt* sometimes also written *kt-ib*.

6 A.H. GARDINER, *op. cit.*, p. 344, § 427.

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Whatever the origin of this particle, it is unanimously accepted that it expresses a contingent future event.

It is also known, that the *sḏm.kɜ.f* and all *kɜ*-headed constructions "always constitute main clauses" but they "never occur in absolute initial position, at the very beginning of a text. On the contrary, they always follow some element with which they are bound by meaning and syntax, in different degrees".[7]

Papyrus Westcar, and specially the tale of the birth of the three royal children, includes many constructions with the particle *kɜ*, some of which are somewhat unusual and, therefore, were interpreted in different ways. This article aims at analysing these constructions and related passages, and comparing the different interpretations, in order to reach the best of them.

When Djedj the magician announces to king Khufu the birth of the three royal children belonging to a different dynasty, the heart of the king becomes sad. Djedj tries to comfort him saying that this will not happen so soon, therefore he should not worry. He tells him : *kɜ sɜ.k kɜ sɜ.f kɜ wʿ im.s(n)*.[8] This construction formed of the particle *kɜ* + noun is quite unusual and has been translated in different ways :

Lichtheim translates it as "First your son, then his son then one of them".[9]

Following the theory that the particle *kɜ* is derived from the verb *kɜj* ("to think about, to consider") Hannig[10] considers it an imperative form of this verb meaning "a more or less polite invitation to consider a fact in a new light". Accordingly he translates this passage : "Consider please, first your son, then his son, then one of them".[11]

Another translation was given by Depuyt : "(First you) then your son, then his son, and then one of them".[12]

A different interpretation of this passage was given by an Egyptian scholar in an unpublished Ph.D. thesis in German.[13] He translates it : "Es ist dein Sohn, es ist sein Sohn, es ist einer von ihr".[14]

These different translations will be analysed here from two different angles :

1. The meaning of the particle *kɜ* in this context.
2. The sentence construction.

7 P. VERNUS, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
8 P. Westcar, 9,14.
9 M. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* I, Berkley, 1971, p. 219.
10 R. HANNIG, "The particle *kɜ*", *GöttMisc* 95, 1987, pp. 9-19.
11 *Ibid*., p. 12.
12 L. DEPUYT, *op. cit.*, p. 242.
13 M. EL-ZERA'I, *Die nicht enklitischen Partikeln im Mittelägyptischen*, Sohag, 1996, (unpublished thesis).
14 El-Zera'i's translation of *wʿ im.s* as "einer von ihr" does not make sence since he failed to notice the very common use of the writing *.s* for *.sn*. The plural pronoun *.sn* referring here to the future three kings. Therefore, it should have been translated as "einer von ihnen".

The meaning of the particle *kꜣ* in this context

We are dealing here with only the first occurrence of the particle in *kꜣ sꜣ.k, kꜣ sꜣ.f, kꜣ ʿw im s(n)*, since there is no disagreement about the translation of the two other instances.

Lichtheim's translation of *kꜣ sꜣ.k* as "first your son", agrees with the meaning of the context but does not suit the future contingent meaning of the particle, nor is the translation "first" justified, except for literary purpose.

This unacceptable "first your son" was also added in Hannig's translation after the suggested "consider please" as the meaning of the first *kꜣ* particle. This rendering (consider please), which was adopted in all Hannig's examples, has been criticised by Vernus who does not agree that the "basic meaning of *kꜣ* could be found out through its etymology".[15]

Although I do not agree with this theory, as above mentioned, it will be shown later, that this interpretation "consider please" does not always suit the meaning or the context.

Depuyt, on the other hand, assumes the presence of "first you" addressed to king Khufu, in order to respect the contingent meaning of each of the *kꜣ* particles. But the fact is, that when the magician is talking, Khufu is already ruling, so his rule is not to be argued about. Thus, it is not quite acceptable in this context.

El- Zera'i's translation "Es ist dein Sohn, es ist sein Sohn, es ist einer von ihr (ihnen)" does not agree with the function of the particle as expressing future contingency.

The sentence construction

Depuyt suggests that this construction, consisting only of *kꜣ* + noun, is an elliptical form of the construction *kꜣ.f sḏm.f*; accordingly the logical full interpretation of this passage would be: "(When Khufu dies) then his son (will reign); (when his son dies,) then his grandson (will rule); (only when his grandson dies,) then (will) one of the three children (rule)." This interpretation agrees with the contingent meaning since each contingent new rule depends on the end of the reign of the preceding king.

Another elliptical form was suggested by El-Zera'i who believes that *sꜣ.k* following the particle is the predicate of the sentence while the subject is omitted. The full construction should have been *kꜣ* + subject + adverbial predicate (*m* of predication + noun). He also suggests that the particle *kꜣ* replaces the particle *iw* used in a sentence with elliptical subject so the full form should be: *kꜣ Ø <m> sꜣ.k, kꜣ Ø <m> sꜣ.f kꜣ Ø <m> wʿ.w im.s.* Instead of *iw Ø < m> sꜣ.k, iw Ø < m> sꜣ.f iw Ø< m> wʿ.w im.s.*

The auxiliary *iw* can, in fact, introduce sentences where, as suggested by El-Zera'i, the subject is omitted: ex. *iw Ø mi sḫr nṯr* "(it) is as if planned by the god (lit. like the planning of the god)".[16]; *iw Ø nfrw* "(it) is good"[17].

15 P. Vernus, *op. cit.*, p. 94, n.69.

16 M. Lichtheim, *op. cit.*, p. 225 (Sinuhe, B 43); W. Schenkel, *Tübinger Einführung in die klassisch-ägyptische Sprache und Schrift*, Tübingen, 1991, § 6.4.2.1b, p. 152.

17 CT III, 4F G1T; Schenkel, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

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Other rare classical language constructions with *iw* omit, on the other hand, the predicate. The construction is then only formed of *iw* + subject. Such a construction forms an existential sentence where *iw* would gain an existential meaning "there is"; the auxiliary *iw* acting as "overt existential predicate" stating the existence of the subject: ex. *iw Ø sšp ḏḏ N iw Ø knꜣ ḏḏ N,* "There is light says the deceased, there is darkness says the deceased".[18]

Thus, both the subject or the predicate could be omitted after the particle *iw*. If our particle *kꜣ* replaces *iw* in such a construction, then it might have been used instead of *iw* in order to express future.

But which of the two constructions would be used here? The one omitting the subject or that omitting the predicate?

It is generally known that the future tense in a non verbal sentence with adverbial predicate is expressed, either by means of the preposition *r* before the predicate, or by the geminated auxiliary verb *wnn*. The particle *kꜣ*, on the other hand, is never used in a non-verbal sentence with adverbial predicate; since whenever the contingent meaning is required in such a sentence, it is expressed by means of the particle *kꜣ* followed by the auxiliary *wn.f* in order to convert the sentence into a verbal one corresponding to the construction *kꜣ sḏm.f*: ex: *kꜣ wn.k ḥnꜥ.k m s wꜥ*, "then thou shalt be with him as one man".[19]

Therefore I do not favour El-Zera'i's suggested construction "*kꜣ*+ noun + *m* + predicate".

Thus, from the two elliptical forms, *kꜣ Ø* <*m*> *sꜣ.k* suggested by El-Zera'i, or *kꜣ.f* <*sḏm.f*> by Depuyt, the latter would be more plausible.

Moreover, in this particular context the vernacular language could have been used instead of the more formal one used in other parts of the story. Let us imagine the scene as it might have happened: the king is so depressed after the news of the birth of the three royal children who do not belong to his dynasty, that the magician tries to reassure him by showing him the insignificance of such an event. Thus, he expresses himself indifferently in a free and easy way telling him: "(after your reign) then it will be your son, then his son, then one of them" this would equal in Arabic:

(لسه) حيكون ابنك وبعدين ابنه وبعدين واحد منهم or (بعد عهدك) سيكون ابنك ثم ابنه ثم واحد منهم.

The insinuated condition of the end of the king's reign, on which the contingent case is built, has been intentionally omitted; since the superstitious Ancient Egyptian, like his successors the actual ones, would not dare face the king with the thought of his death, whether soon or after many years. Moreover, in the colloquial language, such a construction would not need to be completed, all the missing elements being implicit. So that it could be considered as an elliptical form common in the vernacular language. The construction would then consist of *kꜣ* + noun, the particle being the predicate which states the contingent state in which the subject will be as a result of the previous condition. Future contingency

18 CT IV 29e; A. Loprieno, *op. cit.*, p. 122, Chap. 5.6.
19 P. Kahun, 31, 20-1; A.H. Gardiner, *op. cit.*, § 242.

being the main difference between the use of the particle *kꜣ* here and the use of the auxiliary *iw* or *wnn* in similar constructions.

The Arabic translation of this construction has shown us that the first *kꜣ* could be translated حيكون which equals the future of the existential verb يكون – كان. The second and third instances of the particle in the sentence would equal the Arabic ثم[20] used to express consecutive events which follow each other after a long span of time and not in the near future.

In this example, then, emphasis is laid upon two different grammatical purposes for the particle : First, the contingency of events based on a previous condition (when the king dies), then the future tense. Therefore, the suggested translation "(after you) it will be your son, then his son, then one of them" would be more appropriate.

Following this conversation, the king asks the magician about the date of birth of these children. The date (i.e. the first month of the winter season, day 15) will, unfortunately, coincide with the season when the sand banks of the *rmwy* canal will be dry. So he says, *bꜣk.i ꜣ n.s ḏs.i kꜣ mꜣn.i tꜣ ḥwt-nṯr nt Rʿ nb sꜣḫbw* or as translated by Lichtheim "I would have crossed over myself, so as to see the temple of Re Lord of Sakhebu".[21]

Hannig's translation of this passage stands, as he says, on shaky ground because of the foregoing sentence (*bꜣk.i ꜣ n.s ḏs.i*) which is inadequately interpreted. Without translating this sentence, he follows his theory in the previous passage and translates this sentence : "consider please that I would like to see this temple of Re, Lord of Sakhebu" because, as he says, "the king gives Djedi to understand that there is a reason why he wants to travel".[22]

El-Zera'i translates this passage : "soll ich den Tempel des Re, des Herrn von Sakhebu sehen".[23] This translation still omits the future contingent meaning of the particle.

"Dann will ich den Tempel des Re des Herrn von Sakhebu sehen" is the translation given by Schenkel.[24]

In fact, the proper interpretation of the passage *bꜣk.i ꜣ n.s ḏs.i* is very important for the understanding of the following construction beginning with *kꜣ*.

The verb *ꜣ*[25] in this passage means "to step over, to tread, to make a step". It occurs twice in this text, the second occurrence reads : *iry.s ꜣ r gs.i* translated "she stood beside me" or better "she made a stepping beside me". As for the verbal form *bꜣk.i*, it literally means "I work". Thus the two verbs combined in this expression would imply a movement done with effort ; translated together they would mean : "I will make the effort to go (to step over)". The whole passage would then be translated : "I will make the effort to walk to her myself". This translation would equal in Arabic : حاتعب وأخطى لها بنفسى.

20 عباس حسن، النحو الوافى – الجزء الثالث – دار المعارف المصرية – القاهرة ١٩٦١ ص. ٤٢٥ «ثم ومعناها الترتيب مع عدم التعقيب أى الترتيب مع التراخى وهو انقضاء مدة زمنية طويلة بين وقوع المعنى على المعطوف عليه ووقوعه على المعطوف».

21 M. LICHTHEIM, *op. cit.*, p. 219 ; P. Westcar, 9, 17 ; notice that this translation omits the translation of *n.s* "to her".

22 R. HANNIG, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

23 M. EL-ZERA'I, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

24 W. SCHENKEL, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

25 *Wb* I, 10 ; R. HANNIG, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen, Großes Handwörterbuch – Ägyptisch – Deutsch (2800 - 950 v.Chr.)* in *Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt*, Bd. 64, p. 1. Both refering to these two instances in the Papyrus Westcar which seem, till now, to be the only occurrences of that verb (Westcar, 9,16 and 12, 25).

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Kꜣ mꜣn.i tꜣ ḥwt-nṯr nt Rʿ nb sꜣḫbw : all previous translations of this passage imply that the motive of the king for crossing the channel is, mainly, to see the temple of Ra. But, in my opinion, his aim was first of all to see the woman and her three children and then, consequently, see the temple of Ra. That is why he begins by inquiring about their date of birth.

When he is told of the date, he observes that this event will happen just when the sand banks are dry. Still, he is ready to make the effort to walk to her himself in spite of the fact that the channel is dry. Then, he will take this opportunity to see the temple of Ra. Thus, the second event depends on the fact that he could go to her. If that is so, the most suitable translation of this passage would be "I will make the effort to walk to her myself then I will see the temple of Ra Lord of Sakhebu". This explains the use of the particle *kꜣ* stressing on the contingent event that depends on the previous condition.

Kꜣ rdi.i ḫpr mw nw mḥ 4 ḥr ṯsw nw rmwy[26] says the magician, which Hannig translates : "Consider please, that I can raise four cubits of water over the sand banks of the *rmwy* channel".

"Ich werde veranlassen, daß Wasser von 4 Ellen auf dem Gebiet des 2-Fisch-Kanals entsehen" as translated by El-Zera'i.[27]

The fact is, that the magician, faced with the insistence of the king to see this woman and her three children, decides to raise the water in the channel to make it easier for him. Therefore, the raising of the water in the channel depends on the king's strong wish to cross it, even if it is dry. Hence the translation of the passage as "therefore I shall make 4 cubits of water over the sand banks of the *rmwy* channel" would be more appropriate.

The last example in the tale of the birth of the royal children using the particle *kꜣ* is a composite construction : *kꜣ in* + noun + *sḏm.f*. After her delivery, when Rwddedet inquires about the condition of the house, she is told that "it is ready with everything except beer jugs", because there was no barley for making beer except the sack of barley which the dancers brought. So Rwddedet ordered her maid to bring from it saying her husband would replace it later : *ḫꜣ in im.f kꜣ in Rʿ-wsr rdi.f n.sn ḏbꜣ iry m-ḫt iw.f* "go down, bring some of it, Rawoser shall give them its equivalent when he comes".[28]

Most translations of this passage are similar, except for Hannig's translation which, as in all previous examples is "consider please, it is Rawoser who will give". This translation does not agree with the contingent meaning of the particle *kꜣ*. The presence of both the particle and *in* + noun + *sḏm.f* indicates that *kꜣ* here has a specific contingency role, the future being explicitly indicated by the predicative *sḏm.f*. Then, as Depuyt suggests, the best translation would be " then (that is if some of it is brought) Rawoser will reimburse them when he comes".[29]

26 M. LICHTHEIM, *op. cit.*, p. 219 (Westcar, 9,17, 18.)
27 M. EL-ZERA'I, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
28 M. LICHTHEIM, *op. cit.*, p. 221 (Westcar 11,25,26.) ; this translation disregards the presence of *kꜣ* since the future is expressed by the *in* + noun + *sḏm.f* construction.
29 L. DEPUYT, *op. cit.* p. 243.

After having analysed all previous passages I reached the following conclusions :

1. It is quite logic to render the etymology of the particle *kꜣ* or the verb *kꜣ* meaning "to say" in the future, to the verb *kꜣj* meaning : "to think over, to consider, to think about, to plan", since the thinking and the planning precede the action.
2. The *kꜣ* + noun construction in the first passage is an elliptical form common to the vernacular language and needs not be completed.
3. In the second passage the emphasis is on the seeing of the woman and her three children, while the visit of the temple is only secondary. Hence, we can not translate it "so as to see the temple" or "consider please that I would like to see the temple" or "soll ich den Tempel sehen". It must be translated "then I will see the temple."
4. The *kꜣ in* + noun + *sḏm.f* construction in the last example stresses on the contingent role of the particle *kꜣ*, since the future is expressed by means of the *in* + noun + *sḏm.f* construction.
5. Hannig's interpretation "consider please" does not stand on firm ground and does not go along with the essence of the dialogue between the magician and the king. Therefore, it must be disregarded in each case.
6. The translation of these passages, as shown through this work has proved that the contingent – future meaning of the particle *kꜣ* must not be overlooked and that "then, therefore" are the best translations for this particle.

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