

CONTACT-INDUCED LANGUAGE CHANGE OF EGYPTIAN-COPTIC LOANWORD LEXICOGRAPHY IN THE *DDGLC* PROJECT

Coptic is the name of the last phase (ca. 300 CE – 1300 CE) of the longest-attested human language available to linguistic study, the Ancient Egyptian language (Loprieno 1995 & 2001; Schenkel 1990). Next to Greek, Latin and Syriac, Coptic is one of the most important languages of ancient Christian literature. Biblical books and other early Christian texts have been translated into, and composed in Coptic. In addition, writings of ‘heretical’ movements, such as Manichaeism and Gnosticism, survived (often exclusively) in Coptic manuscripts; among them the notorious *Gospel of Judas*. Besides its significance as a written medium of *literary texts*, Coptic also served the written communication of day-to-day life. Massive finds of papyri in Egypt have revealed thousands of *documentary texts*, such as private and business letters, administrative writings and private legal documents, all written in Coptic. Apart from the contrast between the language used in formal, literary circumstances and that of the wider social sphere, Coptic also includes up to a dozen highly standardized written dialects (Funk 1991, Kasser 1991b), as well as a number of less standardized (or de-standardized) norms. In terms of ancient languages, the corpus of Coptic texts is extraordinarily extensive and diverse. This diversity makes generalizing work on Coptic more complex, but also more revealing.

Coptic was an eminent 'language in contact,' mainly borrowing from two donor languages, Greek and Arabic. Greek was spoken and heard in Egypt as early as in the 7th century BCE, a millennium before the standardization of Coptic. Greek merchants who settled in Egypt and mercenaries in the Pharaohs' armies were acting as early agents of linguistic interaction. As a result of the campaigns of Alexander the Great, Greek spread over the Eastern Mediterranean and became the most important lingua franca in the Middle East. In Egypt, where one of Alexander's generals established a Hellenistic dynasty, Greek was used alongside the native Egyptian language from the 4th century BCE up to the 8th century CE. For more than 1000 years Greek functioned both as the spoken language of a courtly and urban élite, and as a written language. It gradually dominated administration, economy, literature, sciences, and even private day-to-day correspondence. Only after the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs in the mid-7th century CE, the importance of Greek diminished. Some of its functional domains were occupied by the Coptic native language, and by Arabic, the language of the new governors (Richter 2010). The massive Greek impact on the contemporary Egyptian idiom becomes obvious in thousands of Greek loanwords in Coptic, representing almost all parts of speech and semantic fields (Kasser 1991a, Lefort 1934, Oréal 1999, Rahlf 1912, Reintges 2001, 2004). Occasional Arabic loanwords occurring in 8th- and 9th-century CE Coptic texts indicate incipient Coptic-Arabic contact, and Coptic texts from the 10th and 11th centuries, the period in which major parts of the indigenous population of Egypt began to shift from their native language to Arabic, bear evidence of intensified borrowing from Arabic (Richter 2006, 2009b).

All in all, it is not an exaggeration to say, that the Greek-Egyptian contact is the most broadly and densely attested case of language contact in antiquity. Beginning with borrowing from Greek into pre-Coptic Egyptian, and taking borrowing from Arabic into later Coptic into account, the Egyptian-Coptic language provides the opportunity to look over 1.500 years of contact-induced language change in a single ancient language under fairly well-known historical and sociolinguistic conditions. The exceptional wealth of language data and their diachronic extent would seem to make investigation in linguistic borrowing into Coptic a most rewarding work.

However, not at least because this wealth, traditional lexicographical approaches to the loan vocabulary of Coptic (Böhlig 1956, Weiß 1969, Tubach 1999) failed three times during the 20th century.

In April 2010, a project entitled *Database and Dictionary of Greek Loanwords in Coptic (DDGLC)*, started a systematic lexicographical analysis and description of Greek loanwords as attested in Coptic texts. The core tool of the *DDGLC* project is a relational database designed to connect linguistic and extra-linguistic data concerning types and tokens of all identifiable loanwords in Coptic. The amount of Greek loanwords in Coptic texts are estimated 4.500 types and 1.000.000 tokens. Additionally there are also substantial numbers of Greek loanwords in Pre-Coptic Egyptian texts (Clarysse 1987, Fewster 2002) as well as Arabic loanwords in later Coptic texts (Richter 2006). Also the occasional loanword from other potential contact languages (e.g. Latin, Syriac, Nubian, Berber) will be recorded in the *DDGLC* database.

The database combines, and will reveal the relationships between multiple levels of data: At its foundational level, the database records every single instance of a foreign word used in a Coptic source (i.e. token usage); each individual attestation will provide the loanword's full textual context, an English translation, and an encoding to identify its significant grammatical characteristics. At the next level, all data from the attestation-level will be grouped according to their "type", forming a list of sublemmata, as one would see in a dictionary. Above this all stands a meta-linguistic level, which categorizes the data according to their textual and manuscript source, as well as the dialect, region and date in which it was written.

The proposed paper will introduce the *DDGLC* database and provide examples of issues that can be approached, and results expected to be gained by means of this tool.

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