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“LOW” AND “HIGH” DIALECTS IN RAMESSIDE EGYPTIAN*

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The ever elusive relationship between Hochsprache and Alltagssprache is of special interest to all modern dictionary compilers. Until not too long ago, the “Low”1 varieties of language were still regarded by lexicographers as a sort of linguistic backwater, not always fit for the dictionary, whose supposed function was to reflect—and thus of course to sustain, invigorate or even create—the so called Standard Dialect, usually controlled by the elite’s cultural agents. The Low language varieties were thus relegated mostly to special linguistic “ghettos”—colloquial and slang dictionaries of various sorts. This state of affairs has, of course, been changing rapidly in recent years, along with changing conceptions of dictionaries and their functions; yet as languages live on and continue to reinvent themselves the question to which extent should the “slang”, “cant” or “Rottwelshe” varieties of language be included, if at all, in a standard dictionary, remains as baffling now as ever.

This, however, is one anxiety mercifully spared the compilers of the new Allägyptisches Wörterbuch. Egyptologists are only too grateful for every word salvaged from the past, and all words appearing in the ancient texts are sure to be included in the new dictionary.

Furthermore, the terms Hochsprache, Standard Language, High variety, Alltagssprache, Colloquial, Vulgar, Vernacular or Low variety and the like all belong to the socio-linguistic aspects of language. Primarily, they are evaluative terms, or status determinatives, labeling

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1 I am most grateful to Prof. Walter F. Reineke and Prof. Wolfgang Schenkel for the invitation to lecture on the theme Hoch- und Alltagssprachen in Ramessidischer Zeit at the conference.

2 For a recent definition of the term see Hodge—Kress, “Social Semiotics, Style and Ideology”, in Sociolinguistics, 53-54.

those social voices which play for triumph, survival or slow extinction within the linguistic arena. There are, I would argue, very good reasons that such labels should not be summoned to hedge in the findings of the *Wörterbuch*. To give one crucial example, the written documents of Ancient Egypt during the Ramesside period clearly indicate the introduction of a new language variety into the written corpus, a variety Egyptologists usually call "vulgar", "administrative", "non-literary" or "colloquial". It might therefore be suggested that some kind of word classification in the dictionary, such as "colloquial", to mark the words originating in the newly introduced texts of this variety, might provide additional profitable information for the student of the Egyptian language.

One fact which absolutely forbids this notion, however, cannot be overstated; namely, that the modern spectator, when confronting the texts of the Ramesside Period, should be aware that he is not, in fact, watching the struggle between spoken language and standard language. The spoken dialect is one we are eternally barred from. We do have access, however, to the forceful struggle within the Standard variety for more powerful representation and legitimization of the standardized Low variety. Every administrative, non-literary or non-official text that has come down to us must be regarded, not as the spoken variety of the time, but only as a representative of the "written as if spoken" variety, probably a normative Low variety which had, at some stage, been granted official entry into the written repertoire and emerged "victorious". Here, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s terminology, is the business of the "linguistic market", which, as far as we are concerned, is nonetheless confined to the Standard variety.

In this article I wish to trace the evidence for the linguistic processes which evolved at the beginning of the Ramesside Period, those processes involved in the standardization and legitimation of the Low variety within the Standard variety. In the last part of the essay I shall also touch on another process, occurring at the end of this period, when the Low variety scored some short-lived yet remarkable triumphs in the center of the repertoire.

The last two years have witnessed a growing interest in the so-called "diglossic" situation during the Ramesside Period; from among the direct or indirect contributions on the subject, I will mention only the articles in the new volume "Ancient Egyptian Literature", and the comprehensive article by Karl Jansen-Winkeln "Diglossie und Zweisprachigkeit im alten Ägypten". My working hypothesis is that all varieties of language represented in texts produced (as opposed to retained) during the Ramesside Period should be considered as part and parcel of the legitimate Standard Dialect of the period. This Standard variety obeys strict rules of language use, rules preconditioned by genres and registers.

The social dialects represented in the written corpus of the period can be divided into two main sub-corpora, both comprising the Standard variety: the first is the "non-literary" corpus, almost always confined to the Alltags or Umgang realm, representing the standardized Low variety of the period. It is made of a stable aggregate of a few Middle-Egyptian forms which have survived into the dialect, and of a relatively large number of new syntactic and lexical forms allowed into the corpus of written texts. The linguistic description of this corpus has yet to be completed. While Jaroslav Černý and Sarah Groll have described the system of the 20th dynasty, its direct forerunner—the non-literary language of the 19th dynasty, also a strictly rule-governed system— still awaits a comprehensive description. All in all, the aggreg —

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4 The classification colloquial was still in use in the 1991 version of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

5 For this definition see Gregory, *Journal of Linguistics* 3 (1967), 177-198.

6 "Through a complex historical process, sometimes involving extensive conflict ..., a particular language or set of linguistic practices has emerged as the dominant and legitimate language, and other languages or dialects have been eliminated or subordinated to it. This dominant and legitimate language, this victorious language, is what linguists commonly take for granted. The idealised language or speech community is an object which has been pre-constructed by a set of social-historical conditions endowing it with the status of the sole legitimate or 'official' language of a particular community." Thompson, "Introduction", in *Language and Symbolic Power*, 5.

7 For a discussion of standardization see Haugen, "Language Standardization", in *Sociolinguistics*, 341-352.; Ferguson, "Standardization as a Form of Language Spread", in *Sociolinguistic Perspectives: Papers on Language in Society*, 189-199.

8 Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian literature: history and forms*.


10 "dialect A variety of language which differs grammatically, phonologically and lexically from other varieties, and which is associated with a particular geographical area and/or with a particular social class or status group" (Trudgill, *Introducing language and society*, 11). Geographical dialects are usually thought not to be represented during the Ramesside Period. For a different view see Groll, "A Short Grammar of the Spermeru Dialect", in *Festschrift Westendorf*, 41-61.

11 Good examples of the sophistication of registers and social dialects used during the 19th dynasty are the texts of Nebre collected by Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions* III, 653-659. On his well-known stela Nebre represents himself praising Amon
ate of syntactic forms represented in the so called “non-literary” corpus is limited by the system itself, probably through processes of koinization\textsuperscript{12} such as inflectional reduction or pattern reduction and avoidance of syntactic redundancy, scaling down the level of communicative “noise”.

The second sub-corpus is the corpus of literary texts that first make their appearance in writing during this period. Without any wish to enter the debate on what constitutes “literature”,\textsuperscript{13} I call here “literary” any text that is not written for every-day private use, from administrative exercises, through historical inscriptions to hymns, songs and so forth.\textsuperscript{14} This corpus allows the use of Old and Middle Egyptian forms, some transitory forms (confined to this corpus only, and identified by Groll as the Literary Late Egyptian forms),\textsuperscript{15} and finally also forms belonging to the newly introduced Low dialect.

The use of the different language varieties is in no way arbitrary, but prescribed;\textsuperscript{16} the choice of linguistic and lexical items within the literary dialect is usually strongly conditioned by the required registers by an alluring version of a private-piety hymn, written in the literary register of 19th dynasty Late-Egyptian, containing many Low markers (KRI III 653-655, 6). On the same stela, when the same “idea-em” appears in epithets of the god, the phrases chosen from the aggregate of forms are “Middle-Egyptian” imitations (KRI III 653, 6-7). However, when Nebre thanks Amon he allows himself to “talk” with some Low markers—\textit{pt nb n pt-wbti} (KRI III 653, 9). A letter from Nebre to Nakhtamun concerning some daily-life matters (KRI III 658=ODeM 558) is written in the typical, extremely “pure” Low variety of the 19th dynasty.

\textsuperscript{12} For this term see Ferguson “Standardization as a Form of Language Spread”, in Sociolinguistic Perspectives: Papers on Language in Society, 193-94.

\textsuperscript{13} For the most recent discussions see Assmann, “Kulturelle und literarische Texte”, in Ancient Egyptian literature: history and forms, 59-82, and Loprieno, “Defining Egyptian literature: Ancient texts and modern theories”, in Ancient Egyptian literature: history and forms, 39-58.

\textsuperscript{14} Butemhamun writes a love letter to his deceased wife (oLouvre 698, probably deposited near her coffin; Černý, A Community of Workmen in the Ramesside Period, 369) in a clear literary variant; see Goldwasser, Israel Oriental Studies 15 (1995), 191-205. Theoretically, it could be a copy of a literary text unknown to date, but the text seems to be too personal. See also Frandsen, “The Letter to Ikhay’s Coffin: O. Louvre Inv. No. 698”, in Village Voices, 31-49, and Sweeney, DE 30 (1994), 205-210.

\textsuperscript{15} Groll, OLP 6-7 (1975-76), 237-246.


of language in every single linguistic situation. Some registers invite more archaic prestige forms, while others allow and invite what may be called “imitations” of the new “written as if spoken” forms. (In literary texts, citations or \textit{Alltags} subjects usually present themselves in a linguistic register which is an imitation register of the “written as if spoken” variety, in itself an imitation register.\textsuperscript{17})

Nevertheless, this linguistic picture is far from static. During the whole Ramesside Period we witness a constant struggle of the Low variety to acquire stronger positions within the aggregate of the literary, during which it makes its appearance in new territories—in linguistic registers of the literary repertoire traditionally confined to older, more prestigious, social dialects. However, as with every continuing struggle, the Low variety experiences various “ups and downs”, and advances, not in a straight line, but through many detours and tactical withdrawals.

The reader should, of course, remember that the “genuine”, older, texts stand outside the framework of the discussion of the texts of the Ramesside Period. They are relevant to the texts created during this period only by their use as a treasure trove for inter-textual allusions and citations.

The best starting point for a discussion of legitimation and standardization processes seems to be a fundamental term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin: Any language displaying a duality of varieties, what in Bakhtinian terms is called \textit{Dialogism},\textsuperscript{18} is actually unmasking in that dialogism the existence of different social languages. Read through the eyes of the Bakhtinian school of thought, the introduction of the Low dialect shows as more than a mere result of too wide a linguistic distance between the spoken and the written dialect (as is often argued in the Egyptological literature). It may in fact reflect cultural undercurrents. As Antonio Gramsci puts it: “Every time the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganise the cultural hegemony”.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} I hope to clarify and detail this situation in a far more comprehensive manner in a forthcoming manuscript.


\textsuperscript{19} Cited by Crowley, ibid., 83.
The Low dialect makes its way into the written aggregate, and thus into the Standard variety, via two separate channels; the first, which may be discerned from the First Intermediate Period on, is the slow infiltration of the “language of the people” into the written texts. That the new invader is probably closer to the spoken dialect is evident mostly from its appearance in letters, citations and, later, in the popular “stories” genre. Most illuminating is the rather snobbish remark of the Mentu-user at the beginning of the 12th dynasty, who claims to be .Flush m dl.3.s.

The second channel is the official one; this is a different process, for here the Low variety is accorded legitimacy and standardization by the power-holders. This process is not always transparent but can be detected in the royal circles already before the Amarna period, and indeed as early as the days of Amenophis II, when a copy of the king’s letter is inscribed in hieroglyphs on the stela of Wsr-Stt (Urk IV 1344). This letter is abundant with 3.s’s and bn’s and other Low features, cited as written in the “as if spoken” dialect by the king himself. So the first process is an exceptional consent to an “official publication” in lapidary script of the king’s usage of the Low variety. Until the Amarna period, however, this variety is usually restricted in its representation in writings, to be kept “where it belongs”, in the realm of administration and private writing, and written almost solely in hieratic.

Still, the bolder, more dramatic step forward was taken by Akhenaten. As the most powerful culture-agent, he legitimized the process of using the Low in the “forbidden territories” of the Literary. This act had far-reaching consequences for the Egyptian culture of the Ramesside era. Not only did it drastically change and dramatically enrich the existing literary genres, but more significantly, perhaps, it opened the door for new literary genres, probably already extant in the oral tradition, but standing outside the aggregate of the written canon. These new genres were now able to settle on the fringes of the canonized written repertoire, and some were later to make their way slowly but surely into the center of the literary aggregate of the period. Others, not so vigorous, survived more briefly in the arena.

I wish to illustrate the two processes discussed above with a few brief examples. The first involves the royal role in legitimation of the vernacular. The second deals with a special variety of a fringe genre allowed into the written repertoire during this period.

The first example (fig. 1) comes from a scene in the tomb of the vizier Paser (of the days of Sety I), where an artist is presenting a statue to the vizier. The text contains a short conversation held between the vizier and the artist who fashioned the statue of the king. The text might have had the advantage of not having passed through the filter of the “literary register” (the text is not part of a constructed text), which usually subjects the language to a second level of editing.

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21 See Junge, Einführung in die Grammatik des Neuägyptischen.
22 See Junge, Einführung in die Grammatik des Neuägyptischen.
23 For a recent detailed discussion on the “infiltrations” in Middle Egyptian texts, see Morenz, Beiträge zur Schriftlichkeitskultur im Mittleren Reich und in der 2. Zwischenzeit, 32-36.
24 For this subject in general see Kroebbe, Die Neuägyptisismen vor der Amarnazeit. It would be methodologically incorrect to include the Kamose stela with its strong Low intrusions as one of the examples for official legitimisation. The linguistic canon at the end of the 17th dynasty was probably still unstable, and the canonised employment of forms from the available aggregate of linguistic repertoire was not yet stabilised by the power holders and culture-agents (schools) of the time.
25 For a recent discussion, see Baines, “Classicism and Modernism in the Literature of the New Kingdom”, in Ancient Egyptian literature: history and forms, 157-174. For specific examples, Goldwasser, LingAeg 1 (1991), 129-141. For these processes in general, see Even-Zohar, Polysemy Idioms: The Power of Words, 9-85.
26 Compare Seibert Die Charakteristik. Untersuchungen zu einer altägyptischen Sprechsitte und ihren Ausprägungen in Folklore und Literatur, 19-25, and note 19.
The vizier utters four sentences, of which one is a quotation of the king’s words:27

... ḫy.f Pt-r sr mšs-hrw ḫdd.f
hsyt (w) ḫtr pš-snḫ
nfr nfr ḫy.f-tw n nb jŕ n.k

jmj ḫr f m jf jyj
hr.tw m pr-33 nḫ wḏj snb
hr (j) jf tw hry ... ḫw ḫbsryj ... ḫmjt

The vizier clearly speaks the “written as if spoken” dialect, well known to us from non-literary texts of the period. He speaks with many pšw’s and also uses the (j) jf sḏm emphatic form, the most developed “non-literary” emphatic form of the period. The one-sentence quotation of the king’s words also contains the pš definite article, and the following expression ḫr.tw m Pr-3 is a typical Ramesside formulation, typical of the Low variety.

27 KRI I 293, 11-3; this construction forms the core of Assmann’s article on Egyptian conservatism: Assmann, “Ein Gespräch im Goldhaus über Kunst und andere Gegenstände”, in Gegengabe: Festschrift für Emma Brunner-Traut, 43-60.

28 The relative sḏm n.f form still occurs in non-literary texts of the 19th dynasty, see Groll, “Late Egyptian of Non-Literary Texts of the 19th Dynasty”, in Orient and Occident, 68.

29 This is the non-literary formulation ḫr f m ḫm which is described by Wente “Some Remarks on the ḫr f Formation in Late Egyptian”, in Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky, 532, as “… commonly used at the conclusion of a quotation within a quotation.” Assmann, “Ein Gespräch im Goldhaus über Kunst und andere Gegenstände”, in Gegengabe: Festschrift für Emma Brunner-Traut, 44 resp. 46, reads: “so sagt man (der König) im Palast—LH.” Kitchen, Ramesside Inscriptions. Translated and Annotated: Translations. I, 239 (293:12), reads: “so it was said in the Palace, L.P.H.”


In his elaborate discussion of the text, Assmann remarks that the artist answers in “gleichen eulogischen Stil”.31 However, on the linguistic level the artist’s answer is very different:32

[... ] ḫd.f
j(pr)t n.b iT ni.k

[... ] ḫr f m nbw ḫh.f
ntr jyj n nsw

[... ] ḫw n bjy

Indeed. One will be pleased, for his arms

he: [... ] of face, excellent for his Lord

As for everything that comes out of your mouth -

His Majesty will be pleased by it.

You are the King’s eyes,

The King’s ears

You open your heart to every function

Your teachings circulate in the workshops

The artist’s answer is a fine construct in what can be regarded as “imitation-variety” of pure Middle Egyptian, not at all “contaminated” by the Low variety. This older Standard variety bears strong intertextual allusions to a text familiar to us from an 18th dynasty version in the tomb of Rekhmire (Urk.IV,1156;6-9; fig. 2). The artist seems to conduct a subtle game, as Paser, in another place in his tomb, includes passages of the text known to us from Rekhmire’s tomb as “The Duties of the Vizier”.33

Fig. 2: Text from the tomb of Rekhmire; after Urk. IV 1156.

The artist refers to the phraseology describing the vizier as “eyes” and “ears” of the king, to the expression wn- ḫr or wn-jb n ḫw nb (sponsor of the arts?) and recaptures the verb ḫrj (which was also used in Rekhmire’s inscription and again by Paser), and in an ingenious maneuver refers it back to Paser and not to the king.

Surprisingly, it is the author who answers in the High variety (other workers in the same text speak a much lower variety). It is hard to estimate the intentions of the text at this point. Is the artist being represented as an extreme conservative, making the statue mj pš-jyj


32 KRI I 293, 15-16.

33 KRI I 290-291.
“like the Old One”? Or is it a question of comic relief, the sign of lower social status being the uncalled for use of a High register in a wrong linguistic situation? Or is this rather the perfect official register in which to answer the vizier?

What becomes obvious from this example is the fact that the Low variety is officially represented as the language spoken by both the king and the vizier, and is now standardized and legitimized as a genuine part of the Hochsprache—the Standard dialect. The so-called Low variety has now entered into the official written aggregate and makes its appearance as the “correct” speech form, at least in certain contexts.

The second avenue through which the Low conquers new positions is by entering the canonized literary repertoire, either as new linguistic elements in given genres,34 or through new genres which make their appearance in the New Kingdom. Literary texts written in the Low variety had no status within the canonized literary aggregate (controlled by schools, scribes etc.) until the Ramesside Period. In a rather impressive entrée, the Low variety introduces into the repertoire a few new genres, or strongly modified genres—love songs, stories, model letters, yearning poems to towns, new harpists songs, private piety hymns,35 and last but not least, new mourning songs.

Perhaps the most important and interesting feature shared by some of the new genres is their overt subversiveness.36 We note that some are relatively secular texts, or texts which present very different relations of god and man to what we are used to at this period, with the individual’s feelings standing at their center of interest, and some suggest views of life and death which radically undermine the institutionalized ideas of the establishment.

At this point I would like to concentrate on the somewhat neglected genre of the mourning songs which appears only in a few examples. Some of them, to my mind, are the most beautiful, and, dare I say, the most “modern” love songs of the Egyptian culture.37 The mourning texts can be traced back as far as the Old Kingdom,38 yet the first forerunners of the type of song we are concerned with appear at the days of Amenophis I in the tomb of Renny from El Kab (fig. 3). His two daughters and his wife grieve for him in words of universal sorrow:

Fig. 3: Mourning wife and daughters, tomb of Renny; after Lüdeckens, MDAIK 11 (1943), 37.

His daughter Baba says: Where are you (gone) my father?
His daughter Iahhotep, she says: Where shall I drift, my father?
His dearly beloved wife Nahi says: Where shall I go without my lord for ever?

34 On the “linguistic game” played by the High and Low in literary texts, see Goldwasser, LingAeg 1 (1991), 129-141.
35 “Private Piety” texts exhibit a complicated linguistic picture. It will not be a clear-cut decision whether this genre was first introduced into the repertoire via Low or High varieties.
36 To be differentiated from the terms Gegenwelt and Carnival, as described by Guglielmi, “Die ägyptische Liebespoesie”, in Ancient Egyptian literature: history and forms, 340-42. For “licensed subversion” in Middle-Kingdom literature see Parkinson, “Individual and Society in Middle Kingdom literature”, in Ancient Egyptian literature: history and forms, 137-155. Fringe-texts such as “The Dispute between a Man and his Ba” present subversive ideas in a concretized form of a “dialogue”.
37 The reluctance to use figurative language and High language, are easily recognized trends of modern poetry.
38 For the most comprehensive study of the subject see Lüdeckens, MDAIK 11 (1943). An early occurrence of what might be understood as “personal grief” may perhaps be traced in a sentence uttered by mourning men already in the 6th dynasty. In the tomb of Idu (Dynasty 6), we find an isolated sentence j nb j it nk w (j) “O, my lord, you have taken me!” see Lüdeckens, MDAIK 11 (1943), 16.
39 One gets the impression that these texts were inscribed in a somewhat partisan manner, and that the available space was not well calculated by the scribe. This may be the reason for some difficulties in the texts which look like omissions due to lack of space.
40 (j) j jr.f nr nr is again the early Ramesside emphatic form, see above note 28. I read the as abbreviated tw.
41 Is the preposition br missing in a First Present construction? For the emphatic j jr.f see Černý—Groll, A Late Egyptian Grammar, 382. For jrr tr see Gardiner,
The three women are represented as speaking a dialect scattered with strong Low features: the Ramesside possessive articles, and what seems like a full-fledged Low emphatic form.

This line of texts continues through the 18th dynasty, but we first meet the genre in full bloom in the Tomb of Neferhotep from the days of Eje.42 The wife of the deceased, Meryt-Re, is a singer of Amon, and she is responsible for some amazing mourning songs. With her last kiss to the mummy she says (fig. 4):

![Image of the inscription]

Fig. 4: Meryt-Re's mourning song; after Lüdeckens, MDAIK 11 (1943), 109.

\[
\text{jmjt (mrt)-Rt } \text{I am your [loved-one], Meryt-Re!} \\
\text{prj mjr hjj (Mryt)-Rt} \text{The great one! Do not leave (Meryt)-Re!} \\
\text{shk nfr prj nfr} \text{Your nature was so kind, the good father!} \\
\text{js ṣbj jwjt(w)} \text{My own far you are,} \\
\text{ltj jr k sw mj jh} \text{how could you do so?}
\]

42 Lüdeckens, MDAIK 11 (1943), 109-111.
43 prj is the Ramesside imperative.
44 ṣbj jwjt is common in the mourning songs, e.g. Lüdeckens, MDAIK 11 (1943), 134.

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\[
\text{ṣmn.j wtnjt(wj)t46} \\
\text{hr ssw mk (wj) mštj47} \\
\text{prj mr jhj (hr) hjnt48} \\
\text{twk gr twn} \\
\text{bwyj hrr49}
\]

Alone shall I walk, 
yet still I am behind you.
The one who loved to converse with me 
You are silent, 
you do not speak any more.

The wife identifies herself as snt—"lover", yet the themes of this short elegy are intimacy, comfort and loneliness. They go beyond the erotic and the physical which are central features of the Ramesside genre of "Love Songs". The bond broken by death is deeper, and more keenly portrayed. There are no specific "Egyptian" themes, no metaphors or metonymies that might add local colouring; religion and the gods are absent. Death is final, and the only hope for reunion is for the wife to follow her husband. Despite its use of phraseology common to the mourning genre, this elegy transcends the limits of time and place into the universal.

Though written at the end of the Amarna period, the language variety used by Meryt-Re is an almost pure Low variety, typical of the non-literary texts of the 19th dynasty. It is laden with psw's, and contains the new imperative form, First Present with preformative, and a bwyj hrr form.

The last songs to be mentioned here (for reasons of space) have only recently been published in their complete form by Oising.50 These were partially published by Kees in 1927, as the mourning songs of the Tomb of Neferecheru, a tomb which Kees described as the "Nachwirkung der sog. Tell-Amarna Stils".51 The tomb, dated in the begin-

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45 An interrogative adverb is a strong candidate for an emphatic formation, see Polotsky, RDe 11 (1957), 109-117.
46 smm.k or ṣmn.k can be an emphatic formation of the 19th dynasty, e.g. KRI III 535, 11-12 (= oDeM 328)—hr prj ṣwjt(wj) jw jn (t) t-jnhr; also Groll, OLP 6-7 (1975-76), 245. ṣwjt is a verb of "incomplete predication" see Polotsky, RDe 11 (1957), 109-117 (44, n.1).
47 A mk (wj) dy hms.k(wj) r gsk appears in a second song by Meryt-Re; Lüdeckens, MDAIK 11 (1943), 104-5. mk+[dependent pronoun]+adverbial phrase is known in the non-literary aggregate of the 19th dynasty, e.g. KRI III 539, 10: r-nty mk [wj] hr jn kr.
48 The preposition hr may appear superfluous in non-literary texts of the 19th and 20th dynasties, e.g., KRI IV 156, 6; KRI V 564, 13,16. See also the Mes inscription, note 30 above.
49 bwyj hrr is still used in the non-literary corpus of the 19th dynasty: KRI III 558, 11.
50 Oising, Das Grab des Neferecheru in Zawyet Sultan, 53-7, Taf.36.
51 Kees, ZAS 62 (1927), 73.
ning of the 19th dynasty,\textsuperscript{52} includes two mourning songs, flanking the scene of the wife, Muteneferet, mourning her husband’s mummy on his deathbed (fig. 5).

Although written in the same location, these two exquisite texts differ in both their grammatical and topical interests. The first (on the right), is a very personal song:

\begin{verbatim}
Pš-hrwj gr
bw mdw-n.f
Pt-lp dt jbm
j yh ds wj qdl y
sgr.Š w n nbh
h3 ljt ljt njt bj y
jr.t n nwt.t.k
pnšt fs (w) (hr?) snhs qd.k
rs.k sdm.k brw j
jtj pš-mnjw
r š n nbh (r) dmr j nb
strw nš n jmniq qsn sfr sn
wdf wj jsm n.sn
bw sqd f hrt f
hlp f m sf wkt
nbb r f m kkw
\end{verbatim}

The one who had a voice—is silent.  
The self-possessed-one, has become an ignorant.  
How wretched the sleeper,  
when he sleeps for ever!  
Oh, would the bed beneath you do as your nurse has done!  
She will turn you over awaking you  
from your sleep!  
Please wake up and hear my voice!  
The herdsman has been taken  
to the land of eternity, to the city of infinity.  
Hidden are the Westerners, miserable  
their state!  
How idle\textsuperscript{53} is the one who goes to them!  
He does not tell his fate.  
He rests alone in his place,  
 eternal darkness before him.\textsuperscript{54}

The poetical merits and grammatical details of this elegy will be discussed elsewhere. However, in its style it is reminiscent of the love songs, and harpists’ songs.\textsuperscript{55}

Yet the second song is even more striking (fig. 6). In this rather conventional tomb\textsuperscript{56} we find a second subversive text, forcefully concentrating on the contradiction of the official values and views on life and death as represented and cultivated by the culture-center on countless occasions. Here, ideas that were only partially implied by the earlier mourning songs (or in harpists’ songs), acquire a mature, radical, and impersonal tone. In a text within a text, the wife cites the professional female mourners:

\begin{verbatim}
Pt-pr n nty.w (n) jmniq
sw md kkw (?)  
bn sbš bn sdm jm.f
bn wš(wš) r šfr
bn nùy r sfj(w) htyj\textsuperscript{57}
bw wbn šw jm
\end{verbatim}

The house of the Westerners.  
It lies deep in darkness;  
neither door nor window within it;  
no light to illumine it;  
no northern wind to sooth the heart.  
The sun never shines there.

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{54}] I would like to thank Deborah Sweeney for her useful comments on the article as a whole, and for her assistance in the translation of this song in particular.
  \item[\textsuperscript{55}] The text contains “indexical features” of literary Late Egyptian. e.g. adjectival sentences with \textit{w}. For “indexical features” in Late Egyptian see Goldwasser, \textit{Egyptian 1} (1991). 140-41. 698 is a love letter which is written in the style of the love-songs genre and contains strong allusions to the ideas emerging in the mourning songs. See Goldwasser, \textit{Israel Oriental Studies} 15 (1995), 191-205.
  \item[\textsuperscript{56}] Osing, \textit{Das Grab des Neferecheru in Zawyet Sultan}, 54.
  \item[\textsuperscript{57}] Osing compares this style to the magical spell of pBerlin 3027, see Osing, \textit{Das Grab des Neferecheru in Zawyet Sultan}, 596(g).
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{52} Osing, \textit{Das Grab des Neferecheru in Zawyet Sultan}, 35.
\textsuperscript{53} A sarcastic comment on the helpless condition of the dead.
Little comment is needed here. The total negation of the tomb and of accepted beliefs is most powerfully manifested in a strong Low variety. It opens with pt and nṯy.w., moves on to a First Present construction, then follows with three strongly marked bn-ØN negations, and closes with a bw sḏmf. Unlike the harpists’ songs genre, this song concentrates solely on one topic and so brings it into sharper relief.

It seems that there is good reason to reflect upon the strong subversive voice which is carried into the Egyptian literary repertoire on many occasions by the newly introduced Low linguistic variety. Low variety is therefore not only (as Jansen Winkeln suggests)\(^{58}\) the language of emotions, but an ideological tool.

It is also interesting to note that these most radical of texts are attributed to women, as another important subversive genre, the harpist’s song, is sometimes attributed to the blind. In both cases the attribution need not be taken literally.\(^{59}\) The blind man who sees the truth is a well known motif in world literature.\(^{60}\) The meaning of the typical attribution of the subversive genre to women should be carefully evaluated and not simplistically taken at face value as reading “women sang those songs” or “spoke these varieties”. As far as I can see, and Deborah Sweeney’s studies have confirmed this impression, no identifiable women’s dialect can be detected in the Egyptian texts.\(^{61}\) What we are facing here is probably Dialogism in the the Bakhtinian sense. The concession granted “the language of the people” by Akhenaton, and by the power-holders who came after him, to become a written language, has resulted in the admission of new voices and new ideas, which might initially have been conceived only in this language variety, into the aggregate of texts. Some of these ideas stand in clear contrast to official ideology. Even so, some have successfully infiltrated the center of the literary repertoire and have been officially legitimized even by the king.\(^{62}\) However, any definite conclusion in this field of language and ideology, if available at all, should await a more detailed study of all texts concerned.

I should like to conclude with a remark on the final, though short-lived, triumph of the Low variety. There is a long-standing debate in Egyptology, on the literariness—or otherwise—of Wenamun. On one side of the argument stand Groll, Wente (following Čermý who believed the text to be an actual report, or a copy of one), lately joined by Pascal Vernus.\(^{63}\) On the opposite side stand most Egyptologists, who feel strongly that they are confronting a literary text. The latter point of view has recently been argued elaborately by John Baines. Baines convincingly details all textual and literary reasons in favor of the literariness of Wenamun.\(^{64}\) I would like to suggest a solution which may reconcile these two apparently contradictory views. To my mind, Wenamun is one of several texts,\(^{65}\) some of them clearly literary by subject, sometimes marked by punctuation, that are written almost purely in the Low dialect. These examples reflect a final (even if very limited) triumph of the Low variety in the literary arena of the Ramesside Period. At the very end of the Ramesside Period it hits a high in the “linguistic market”, a point which marks the final legitimation to write literary works in “the language of the people”. Such a course of events is not at all unknown in languages which habitually live the life of diglossia or dialogism, such as Modern Egyptian, or Modern Hebrew.\(^{66}\)

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60 Derrida, Memes of the Blind.
62 E.g. the infiltration of “Private Piety” into the royal repertoire. See Goldwasser, LingAeg 1 (1991), 139-41.
63 Wenamun is a major source of examples for Čermý—Groll, A Late Egyptian Grammar. See Wente’s introduction to the translated text of Wenamun, in Simpson, The Literature of Ancient Egypt, 142; also Vernus, “Langue littéraire et diglosse”, in Ancient Egyptian literature: history and forms, 560-61.
64 I am grateful to Prof. John Baines for letting me have his article before publication. For the latest published discussion of the literary merits of Wenamun see Satsinger, LingAeg 5 (1997), 171-76.
65 “The Tale of Woe” does not belong to this category as it is written in a clear literary dialect, e.g., it contains the literary “indexical marker” nn—see Goldwasser, LingAeg 1 (1991), 140-41.
66 Modern Hebrew, like the Ramesside language, is nourished by a written aggregate that goes back more than two thousand years, from the Bible to today’s vernacular. Literary texts in Modern Hebrew, exactly like the Ramesside texts, usually represent countless mixed varieties, which may lean heavily on intertextual allusions—Biblical, Talmudic, allusions to poetry of the Middle Ages and so on. Yet in the last decade we are witnessing a new stage, when new literary texts are written in a pure “written as if spoken” dialect. The Low dialect is now strong enough to overcome institutional antagonism, led by some culture-agents (such as Academy of Hebrew Language, university professors, literary critics), to its admission into the literary aggregate.
Wenamun presents no real problem. It is probably a literary text after all, not lacking in subversive tones, and written in an almost pure "written as if spoken" variety of the period.

As I believe that all language varieties known to us from the Ramesside texts are already part of the Standard variety, and as this era of the Egyptian language presents a sophisticated flexibility, the dictionary makers should not hasten to any decision in trying to categorize the High and Low varieties of the period. The best way may be to refer the reader to different genres, such as letters, model-letters, historical inscriptions, or stories, from which words originate.

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67 So, for example, the injection b will be confined to "letters", and the expression m str jpr drj to the genre of model-letters.