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No case before the verb, obligatory case after the verb in Coptic*

Abstract: This paper presents a hitherto unnoticed fact about the coding of grammatical relations in Coptic: while postverbal core arguments must be overtly case-marked (or "flagged"), preverbal core arguments are never case-marked. This feature extends the "no case before the verb in northeastern Africa" generalization (König 2008; 2009) to the northeastern Mediterranean. Moreover, the analysis presented here reveals Coptic to be another case of an uncommon system of core argument marking, namely, "marked S/A vs. marked P".

1   No case before the verb in Coptic

Despite the fact that Coptic is a well described and abundantly attested language, with a dozen or so dialects (Funk 1988), a simple yet important feature of its grammatical structure has gone unremarked in grammatical descriptions: there are no core case distinctions before the verb, and postverbal core arguments must be case-marked.[1] This feature extends König's (2008; 2009) "no case before the verb in northeastern Africa" generalization geographically to the northeast Mediterranean. It also extends it genealogically, adding Egyptian-Coptic to Berber as Afroasiatic languages with this feature.[2] Finally, Coptic corroborates König's generalization, according to which "if there is no case distinctions before the verb, then preverbal participants occur in the morphologically unmarked form" [i.e.,

1 I assume here a broad definition of the comparative concept "case marker", roughly corresponding to the notion "flag", "relator", or "dependent-marker". Such definitions are common in typological studies of case (e.g., Haspelmath 2008; Siewierska & Bakker 2008), and it is in this sense that the term "case" is used in this paper.
2 Whether Berber "states" ought to be described in terms of case is disputed; see Mettouchi & Frajzyngier (2013) on Kabyle, as well as Arkadiev's reaction (fc).

the morphosyntactically simplest form, EG] (2008: 281), but extends it to languages which do not have ergative or marked-nominative coding.

The structure of this paper is as follows: in § 2, I present a bare-bones account of the encoding of grammatical relations in Coptic[3] and in § 3 some frequency data. In § 4, I argue that Coptic does not have a marked nominative system. In § 5, I provide a brief note on diachrony, and in § 6, König's "no case before the verb" generalization in African languages is briefly sketched. All examples, unless noted otherwise, are taken from the earliest documentation of Bohairic, the northernmost Coptic dialect (Grossman 2009a).

2 Encoding grammatical relations in Coptic: indexing and case-marking

Grammatical relations are language-specific categories, often (but not exclusively) encoded by means such as indexation ("agreement"), flagging ("case"), and linear order (Frajzyngier & Shay 2003; Payne 2013). Behavioral properties, e.g., control of reflexivization, will not be dealt with here.

Grammatical relations in Coptic are encoded by means of four main strategies: indexation, argument incorporation, case marking, and linear order. In this section, I refer only to main (i.e., non-subordinate) intransitive and monotransitive[4] verbal clauses of a particular construction type, the so-called "non-durative pattern" or "tripartite conjugation" (Polotsky 1960). This morphosyntactic[5] construction type comprises up to four "slots":

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3 A more detailed account of Coptic grammatical relations, in the context of Differential Subject Marking, is given in Grossman & Iemmolo (2014+). The present article provides only enough background in order to substantiate the claim about case-marking and linear order.

4 This is intended to exclude ditransitives, on the one hand, and bivalent intransitives, on the other. Transitive clauses are defined according to Haspelmath (2011b) and Lazard (2002): broadly, a monotransitive clause is a bivalent clause that has A and P as its core arguments; intransitives can be either monovalent (one argument) or bivalent, if the arguments are not A and P. In turn, A and P are defined, respectively, as "the argument of the major two-argument construction that represents the agent when the construction expresses an action" and "the argument of the major two-argument construction that represents the patient when the construction expresses an action" (Haspelmath 2011b).

5 I use the term "morphosyntactic" instead of "morphological", since the latter assumes that the notion "word" is well defined, either as a cross-linguistic comparative concept or as a descriptive category of Coptic (Haspelmath 2011a). For the description of Coptic, the term "bound group" (Layton 2004) is more than adequate.

Table 1: The constructional scheme of a Coptic verb

TAM auxiliary	A/S expression	lexical verb	P expression
a	*f*	*tʰamio*	*f*
PST	3SGM	create	3SGM
'He created him.'			

This is a fairly simplified representation of the structure of the verb, since the TAM auxiliaries can be discontinuous (e.g., the future marker *e...e*), lexical arguments can occur in the A/S and P slots, and both preverbal and postverbal lexical arguments are very frequent in discourse. However, it is important to keep this basic structure in mind, since it is to this construction (rather than the lexical verb) that I refer when I use the terms "verb (V)", "preverbal" or "postverbal."

2.1 Argument Indexing

Intransitive clauses have a maximum of one argument index (ex. 1); in monotransitive clauses, one or two arguments can be indexed on the verb (ex. 2). There is no implicational relationship between A and P indexing, since an A index can occur without a P index, and vice versa (see 2.5 below).

(1) ⲁⲓⲭⲱⲡ
    *a-**i**-kʰôp*   **S**
    1SG-hide
    'I hid' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 3:10).

(2) ⲁϥⲑⲁⲙⲓⲟϥ
    *a-**f**-tʰamio-**f***   **A+P**
    PST-3SGM-create-3SGM
    'He$_1$ created him$_2$' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 1:27).

In terms of alignment, indexing is mixed accusative-neutral, depending on a complex set of phonological and morphosyntactic factors, which are irrelevant to the present discussion. Example (2) shows neutral alignment (A=P) in indexing for this particular constellation of verbal construction, tense, and person. Example (3) shows accusative alignment in indexing: the 1SG A index (-*i*), which is the same as the 1SG S index (cf. ex 1 above), differs from the 1SG P index (-*t*).

(3) ⲉⲓⲧⲱⲛⲧ

    e-i-e-tôn-t   **S=A≠P** (cf. ex. 2)

    FUT1-1SG^A-FUT2-raise-1SG^P

    'I will raise myself up' (Early Bohairic, Nahum 3:5).

2.2 Argument Incorporation

Both lexical subjects (A/S) and objects (P) can be incorporated into the verb,[6] but it is rare for both lexical A and P to be incorporated into the same verb. Incorporated P arguments are bound to the lexical verb, which often shows a prosodically reduced form. This prosodically reduced verb form cannot occur as a free morpheme. For example, in examples (6–8), the forms of the lexical verbs without incorporated P are, respectively *čimi*, *kʰô*, and *tʰamio*.

    (4) **S-incorporation**

        ⲁⲣⲟⲟⲩϩⲓ   ϣⲱⲡⲓ

        *a-**roouhi***   *šôpi*

        PST-evening   become

        'It became evening' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 1:8).

    (5) **A-incorporation**

        ⲁⲫϯ   ⲑⲁⲙⲓⲟ   ⲛⲛⲓⲑⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ

        *a-**pʰ[nou]t**^{i}* *tʰamio* *n-ni-tʰêrion*

        PST-G[o]d   create   ACC-DEF.PL-beast

        'God created the beasts' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 1:25).

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6 The term "incorporation" is used somewhat unconventionally here, since the arguments bound within the morphosyntactic verb can be referential noun phrases as well as "bare" noun lexemes. In this respect, Coptic differs from constructions described as "incorporation" in other languages, but is similar to the way that Boumaa Fijian has been described by Dixon (1988); see also Aikhenvald (2007). On the other hand, Coptic unambiguously treats the verb and the object as a single bound group, by use of a prosodically-reduced verb form that cannot occur on its own. As such, the incorporation analysis will be retained here.

(6) **P-incorporation**

ⲙⲡⲟⲩϫⲉⲙⲃⲟⲏⲑⲟⲥ ⲇⲉ   ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲇⲁⲙ
*mp-ou-čem-**boêtʰos**=de*   *nn-adam*
PST.NEG-3PL-find-helper=CONN ACC-Adam
'A helper was not found for Adam' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 2:20).

(7) **A+P-incorporation**

ⲁⲡϭⲥ   ⲫϯ   ⲭⲁⲟⲩⲙⲏⲓⲛⲓ   ⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲓⲛ
a-pc[oi]s   *pʰ[nou]tⁱ* *kʰa-**ou-mêini***   *n-kain*
PST-the.L[or]d G[o]d   put-INDEF.SG-mark ACC-Cain
'The L[or]d G[o]d put a mark on Cain' (Bohairic, Genesis 4:15).

(8) ⲁⲫϯ   ⲑⲁⲙⲓⲉϯⲫⲉ
a-pʰ[nou]tⁱ *tʰamie-tⁱ-pʰe*
PST-G[o]d   create-DEF.M-heaven
'God created the world' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 1:1).

2.3 Case-marking

Coptic is not traditionally described in terms of case marking. Nonetheless, Coptic has adpositions and other flags that code grammatical relations. As noted above, I assume here a broad definition of the comparative concept "case marker", roughly corresponding to the notion "flag", "relator", or "dependent-marker".

Non-incorporated postverbal lexical subjects (S/A) and objects (P) must be overtly case-marked. The accusative marker (*n-*) is seen in example (9),[7]

(9) **Accusative**

ⲁϥϫⲓ   ⲛⲟⲩⲕⲁϩⲓ   ⲉⲃⲟⲗ
a-f-či   ***n**-ou-kahi*   *ebol*
PST-3SGM-take   ACC-INDEF.SG-earth out
'He took earth' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 2:7).

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7 The accusative case marker was grammaticalized from a highly polyfunctional preposition associated with LOCATIVE, INSTRUMENT, SOURCE, and a number of other functions. See Winand (2014, in this volume) for a discussion of its sources.

The opposition between object incorporation and accusative case marking is generally seen as a case of Differential Object Marking motivated by the interaction of referentiality and topicality rather than, e.g., animacy or definiteness (e.g., Engsheden 2008; Grossman 2009b; Winand 2014, in this volume).

The nominative marker *nče* (*nci* in other dialects, e.g., Sahidic) is found in example (10).

(10) **Nominative**

ⲁⲩⲭⲟⲡⲟⲩ   ⲛ̄ⲭⲉⲁⲇⲁⲙ   ⲛⲉⲙⲧⲉϥⲥϩⲓⲙⲓ
a-u-kʰop-ou   ***nče**-adam*   *nem-tef-shimi*
PST-3PL-hide-3PL   **NOM**-Adam   with-his.F-woman

'Adam and his wife hid' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 3:8).

Few if any Copticists have described *nci/nče* as a nominative marker. It has typically been described as a preposition (Layton 2004), extrapositive subject marker (Loprieno 2000), or focus marker (Reintges 2004). However, it does not have other properties typically associated with prepositions in Coptic, and it is not strongly associated with focus in most dialects. The descriptive label "extrapositive" (or perhaps "postpositive") subject marker would be adequate, but it is perhaps better to have a more specific label. The term "nominative" seems appropriate enough, since *nci/nče* is highly grammaticalized for a particular function, marking postverbal lexical A/S arguments, and has a high token frequency, which indicates that it is not just an "afterthought marker", along the lines of English "namely" or Seneca *neh*.[8]

The co-occurrence of both lexical NOM and lexical ACC is possible but relatively rare:

(11) ⲁϥⲑⲁⲙⲓⲟ   ⲛ̄ⲭⲉⲫϯ   ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲧⲁϫⲣⲟ
a-f-tʰamio   ***nče**-pʰ[nou]tⁱ*   ***m**-pi-tačro*
PST-3SGM-create   **NOM**-G[o]d   **ACC**-DEF.S-firmament

'ᴺᴼᴹGod created ᴬᶜᶜthe firmament' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 1:7).

This rarity stems from the nature of discourse: transitive clauses with more than one lexical core argument tend to have low text frequency across languages (DuBois 1987).

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8 I was made aware of this marker, which looks like a candidate for antitopic marker status, by Wallace Chafe in a lecture (Leipzig, 12/8/2013).

2.4 Preverbal lexical arguments and case-marking

Preverbal lexical arguments are not case-marked.

(12) **Preverbal S**

ⲁⲃⲉⲗ ⲇⲉ   ⲁϥϣⲱⲡⲓ
Abel=de   *a-f-šôpi*
Abel=CONN   PST-3SGM-become
'Abel became…' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 4:2).

(13) **Preverbal A**

ⲁⲇⲁⲙ ⲇⲉ   ⲁϥϯⲣⲁⲛ   ⲉⲛⲓⲧⲉⲃⲛⲱⲟⲩ
Adam=de   *a-f-tⁱ-ran*   *e-ni-tebnôou*
Adam=CONN   PST-3SGM-give-name   ALL-the.PL-animals
'And Adam named the animals' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 2:20).

The following example shows that the absence of case marking is not limited to proper names.

(14) **Preverbal P**

ⲡⲓⲭⲁⲕⲓ ⲇⲉ   ⲁϥϯⲣⲉⲛϥ   ⲭⲉⲡⲓⲭⲱⲣϩ
pi-kʰaki=de   *a-f-tⁱ-ren-f*   *če-pi-ečôrh*
DEF.M-darkness=CONN PST-3SGM-give-name-3SGM QUOT-DEF.M-evening
'The darkness, he named it "evening"' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 1:5).

Preverbal lexical arguments are often marked topics (ex. 15), but they can occasionally be focal as well (ex. 16). Interestingly, topical preverbal arguments tend to be accompanied by the particle *de*, while focal preverbal arguments tend to be directly followed by the verb.

(15)   ⲁⲇⲁⲙ ⲇⲉ   ⲁϥⲥⲟⲩⲉⲛⲧⲉϥϭⲓⲙⲓ
       Adam=de   *a-f-souen-tef-shimi*
       Adam=CONN   PST-3SGM-know-his-woman
       'As for Adam, he knew his wife' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 4:1).

(16) ⲛⲓⲙ   ⲁϥⲧⲁⲙⲟⲕ
      nim   a-f-tamo-k
      who   PST-3SGM-inform-2SGM
      'Who told you?' (Early Bohairic, Genesis 3:11).

2.5 Interim summary

Coptic has three[9] main strategies for coding lexical A/S:

Table 2: Indexing and case for lexical A/S

	Indexing	Case
Incorporated A/S	no	no
Preverbal A/S	yes	no
Postverbal A/S	yes	yes

Coptic also has three main strategies for coding lexical P:

Table 3: Indexing and case for lexical P

	Indexing	Case
Incorporated P	no	no
Preverbal P	yes	no
Postverbal P	no	yes

Several generalizations can be made:
1. All postverbal core arguments must be case-marked.
2. Preverbal and incorporated core arguments are never case-marked.
3. All preverbal core arguments, as well as postverbal subjects, entail indexing.
4. There is no implicational relationship between A and P indexing; all combinations of A and P indexes and lexical arguments are possible:

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9 There are other, relatively infrequent, construction types, but they will be ignored here.

Table 4: Co-occurrence of A/P indexes and lexical arguments

	Indexed P	Incorporated P
Indexed A	*a-f-tʰamio-f*	*a-f-tʰamie-tʰ-pe*
	PST-3SGM-create-3SGM	PST-3SGM-create-DEF.F-heaven
	'He created him.'	'He created heaven.'
Incorporated A	*a-pʰ[nou]tⁱ tʰamio-f*	*a-pʰ[nou]tⁱ tʰamie-tʰpe*
	PST-G[o]d create-3SGM	PST-G[o]d create-DEF.F-heaven
	'God created him.'	'God created heaven.'

Similarly, all combinations of incorporation and case marking are possible for lexical noun phrase core arguments.

Table 5: Co-occurrence of case-marking and incorporation for lexical NP arguments

	Case-marked P	Incorporated P
Case-marked A	Ex. 11	*a-u-el-ôni nče-ni-ouidai*
		PST-3PL-throw-stone NOM-DEF.PL-Jew
Incorporated A	Ex. 5	Ex. 8

All in all, Coptic can be described as having both Differential Subject Marking and Differential Object Marking, which is in itself rare. Coptic Differential Argument Marking is also of a relatively rare type, in which overt case marking alternates with argument incorporation (Grossman & Iemmolo 2014+). Differential Subject Marking in Coptic is triggered by information structure: in the Bohairic dialect, preverbal subjects tend to be contrastive or shifted topics; incorporated subjects tend to be relatively "inert" in terms of topicality, with little backward or forward topicality in texts, or otherwise globally accessible referents (God, evening, morning); postverbal subjects tend to be highly accessible (Ariel 1990), already active in the discourse.[10] This last observation is discussed in the next section.

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10 For details and argumentation, see Zakrzewska (2006); Shisha-Halevy (1986, 2007); and Grossman & Iemmolo (2014+). Loprieno (2000) proposes that postverbal subjects are rhematic, and Reintges (2004) considers that they are focal. In fact, these views are not necessarily contradictory, since Reintges (2004) deals with Sahidic, in which postverbal subjects are more frequently new referents. This, however, is very rare in Bohairic.

2.6 Linear order

Coptic is usually characterized as having basic SVO order, although this description is somewhat controversial. While a description of word order in Coptic is well beyond the scope of this paper, some relevant facts should be mentioned.

1. The order of indexes on the verb is distinctive: an A index always precedes a P index. The order is always A-V^{lex-P}.[11]
2. The order of incorporated core arguments is also distinctive; it is always A-V^{lex-P}.
3. Lexical A, no matter its position, almost always precedes lexical P. One type of exception is when the lexical object is preverbal and the lexical subject is postverbal, e.g.

(17) ⲛⲁⲓ ⲇⲉ   ⲁϥϫⲟⲧⲟⲩ   ⲛ̅ϫⲉⲓⲏⲥ
      nai=de   *a-f-čot-ou*   *nče-iê[sou]s*
      DEM.PL=CONN   PST-3SGM-say-3PL NOM-Jesus
      'As for these things, Jesus said them…' (Early Bohairic, John 12: 36).

This construction type, however, is very rare in discourse.

There are also rare examples in which postverbal lexical P precedes lexical A:

(18) ⲁϥϫⲓ ⲇⲉ   ⲛ̅ⲛⲓⲱⲓⲕ   ⲛ̅ϫⲉⲓⲏⲥ
      a-f-či=de   *n-ni-ôik*   *nče-iê[sou]s*
      PST-3SGM-take=PTCL ACC-DEF.PL-bread NOM-Je[su]s
      'Then Jesus took the loaves of bread' (Early Bohairic, John 6: 11).

However, all in all, lexical A overwhelmingly tends to precede lexical P.

Linear order alternations in Coptic, as in many languages, are motivated by information-structural factors, and as such, linear order is a "coding means" in the sense of Frajzyngier & Shay (2003) and Frajzyngier (2011). As noted above, preverbal arguments are typically contrastive or shifted topics, although, they can occasionally be focal. Postverbal A/S arguments in Coptic, at least in some dialects, e.g., Bohairic, are generally identifiable/accessible (Zakrzewska 2006; Grossman & Iemmolo 2014+).

For example, in (18), 'Cain' occurs in the first clause; in the second clause, 'Cain' is already accessible, and occurs postverbally with NOM-marking.

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11 In terms of linear order, this construction has nominative-accusative alignment, even if the person indexes themselves are neutrally aligned.

(19) ⲁⲡϭⲥ   ⲫϯ   ⲭⲁⲟⲩⲙⲏⲓⲛⲓ   ⲛⲕⲁⲓⲛ
      a-pc[oi]s   *pʰ[nou]tⁱ* *kʰa-ou-mêini*   *n-kain*
      PST-the.Lord G[o]d   put-INDEF.SG-sign ACC-Cain
      'The Lord G[o]d marked Cain.'

      ⲁ϶ⲓ ⲇⲉ   ⲛ϶ⲉⲕⲁⲓⲛ   ⲉⲃⲟⲗ   ϩⲁⲡϩⲟ   ⲙⲫϯ
      a-f-i=de   ***nče-kain*** *ebol* *ha-p-ho*   *m-pʰ[nou]tⁱ*
      PST-3SGM-come=CONN **NOM**-Cain   out   from-DEF.M-face of-G[o]d
      '(and) Cain came away from the Lord's presence' (Bohairic, Genesis 4:
      15–16).

In the Biblical story of Jonah, the ship bearing the runaway is rocked by a storm,
which frightens the sailors. Jonah admits that the storm is his fault.

(20) [ⲉ]ⲑⲃⲏⲧ   ϥϣⲟⲡ   ⲛ϶ⲉⲡⲁⲓϩⲱⲓⲙⲓ
      [e]tʰbêt   *f-šop*   ***nče-pai-hôimi***
      [b]ecause.1SG 3SGM-exist **NOM**-DEM.M-wave

      'Because of me this wave exists' (Early Bohairic, Jonah 1:12).

The NOM-marked subject is the current discourse topic, and as such, is identifi-
able.

In the following example, Jesus and an official are discussing the latter's ill
son, and Jesus says:

(21) ϥⲟⲛϩ   ⲛ϶ⲉⲡⲉⲕϣⲉⲣⲓ
      f-onx   ***nče-pek-šêri***
      3SGM-alive **NOM**-your-son
      'Your son is alive' (Early Bohairic, John 4:50).

Highly identifiable/accessible postverbal arguments are sometimes called *anti-
topics* (Chafe 1976). Antitopics, according to Lambrecht (1981), tend to have the
following cluster of properties: (1) postverbal position; (2) indexed via pronomi-
nal affixes/clitics; (3) case-marked and integrated into clausal syntax, i.e., are not
clause-external; (4) identifiable (textually, frame-evoked, inferable, following
Prince 1981), i.e., they do not introduce new topics. Postverbal subjects in Coptic,
at least in the dialect discussed here, have all of these properties.

3 Frequency

To date, there are no extensive studies of the relative frequency of the various constructions in discourse, other than Zakrzewska (2006), which provides raw frequency data for around 700 narrative clauses in a single corpus of later (ca. 9th century) Bohairic.

Table 6: Subject encoding in later Bohairic

A/S-incorporation	Preverbal A/S	Postverbal A/S (nom)
31.5%	25.7%	42.8%

Note that nearly 70% of clauses have non-incorporated subjects, and nearly half of the tokens have postverbal NOM-marked subjects.

Two small samples of Early Bohairic were examined. In the first, taken from Genesis (Papyrus Bodmer III), all clauses were analyzed, with the following results:

Table 7: Subject encoding in Genesis 1:1–4:3 in all clauses

	Incorporation	Preverbal	Postverbal	Index only	Other
Number	68	12	29	79	80
%	25.373	4.478	10.821	29.477	29.851

For clauses with lexical subjects, one sees that incorporated subjects amount to nearly 70% of all tokens, with preverbal and postverbal subjects far less frequent.

Table 8: Subject encoding in Genesis 1:1–4:3 in clauses with lexical S/A

	Incorporation	Preverbal	Postverbal	Total
Number	68	12	29	109
%	62.385	11.009	26.606	100

However, this has to do with the nature of the text examined: in the first 200 clauses or so of Genesis, God is the only actor, so there is little need for formal devices that mark shifted or contrastive topics (e.g., left-dislocation), or that keep track of alternating subject referents (e.g., postverbal NOM-marked antitopics).

A second sample, from the Gospel of John, was looked at, first counting all clauses, then only clauses with lexical subjects.

Table 9: Subject encoding in the Gospel of John 18:1–19:16 in all clauses

	Incorporation	Preverbal	Postverbal	Index only	Other
Number	10	20	36	71	99
%	4.237	8.474	15.255	30.085	41.949

Table 10: Subject encoding in the Gospel of John 18:1–19:16 in clauses with lexical S/A

	Incorporation	Preverbal	Postverbal	Total
Number	10	20	36	66
%	15.152	30.303	54.545	100

In John (18:1–19:16), the frequencies resemble those found by Zakrzewska (2006) for later Bohairic, with postverbal subjects even more frequent (more than half of tokens of clauses with lexical subjects). This is probably due to the high density of actors (e.g., Jesus, Pilate, the Jews, various disciples, the priests), who have to be kept track of in narrative by formal devices. Importantly, all of the actors are identifiable/accessible in this chunk of text, which accounts for the high frequency of postverbal NOM-marked subjects as opposed to preverbal subjects.

4 Does Coptic have a "marked-nominative" system?

According to König (2008; 2009), the vast majority of African languages with "no case before the verb" have either ergative or "marked nominative" coding. Marked nominative constructions are those in which S and A are encoded by the same means, differing from that of P, but unlike other nominative-accusative constructions, the accusative is the morphologically and functionally "unmarked" form. In this context, "unmarked" means that accusatives are less morphosyntactically complex than nominatives ("morphologically unmarked"), on the one hand, and that accusatives are used in more contexts ("functionally unmarked"). König attributes special importance to the citation form, which in marked nominative systems is the accusative.

Coptic is formally similar to marked nominative systems, in that the nominative is the most functionally restricted case, both syntactically and pragmatically, and tends to occur postverbally in many marked nominative systems. On the other hand, it differs from most marked nominative systems in that *both* the

NOM and the ACC are restricted, in terms of function, relative to the zero-marked (unmarked or "bare") form. Moreover, neither the NOM nor the ACC is the citation form ("absolute" or "designative" case, Creissels 2009), like Japanese, Korean, and Kanuri. Of course, another major difference is the tripartite distinction between preverbal, postverbal, and incorporated subjects, which is atypical of marked nominative systems. The following Table gives an idea of the functions of the three forms:

Table 11: Functions of case markers in Coptic

Case		Function
NOM (*nče-*)	(a)	post-verbal A/S
ACC (*n-*)	(b)	post-verbal P, some adverbials, secondary predicates
unmarked	(c)	citation form
	(d)	vocative
	(e)	following prepositions
	(f)	incorporated S/A/P
	(g)	preverbal S/A/P
	(h)	nominal predications
	(i)	following derivational affixes

As such, Coptic cannot be described as having a marked nominative system, but rather as having an "uncommon pattern of accusative core marking", namely "marked S/A vs. marked P" (Creissels 2009: 453). On the other hand, Coptic does share with many languages with marked nominative systems the property of a basically pragmatic or information-structural basis for the occurrence of case markers. However, this is not exclusive to marked nominative systems: in some languages, postverbal subjects tend to refer to identifiable or accessible entities in discourse,[12] while preverbal subjects have a marked information-structural status, e.g., focus, on the one hand, or contrastive or shifted topic, on the other. What is particular about the Coptic system, and appears to be a cross-linguistic *rarum* is the fact that postverbal subjects have a strong association with antitopic status *and* are obligatorily coded by a highly grammaticalized case marker.

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12 Such languages include Syriac Aramaic (Goldenberg 1983), Biblical Hebrew (Givón 1977), Ojibwa (Tomlin & Rhodes 1992), Mohawk (Mithun 1996), French (Lambrecht 1981), Chamorro (Cooreman 1992), and Sandawe (Eaton 2010). However, to the best of my knowledge there are no cross-linguistic studies of antitopics.

It is likely that an explanation for this association between nominative marking and highly accessible lexical noun phrase referents is another instantiation of a general trend: overt case marking, at least at early stages of grammaticalization, marks unexpected associations between grammatical role and information-structural properties of referents. For example, Iemmolo (2010) argues that differential object marking tends to arise in the context of topical P, since direct objects tend to be new (or "focal"). Similarly, numerous studies of "optional" ergative marking point out that "optional" ergative markers are strongly associated with focal A (e.g., Hyslop 2010; McGregor 2006; Verstraete 2010). This makes sense, since A referents overwhelmingly tend to be highly accessible (Du Bois 1987). In the present context, lexical noun phrases tend to refer to low-accessibility referents, so the occurrence of highly accessible referents as lexical noun phrases would be an unexpected association, and therefore would be prone to being marked overtly. While a number of languages exploit word order to mark this unexpected association (e.g., French and Ojibwa), Coptic seems to be unusual in using case marking.

5   A brief word on the diachrony of Differential Subject Marking in Coptic[13]

Of the three constructions discussed here – subject incorporation, preverbal subjects, and postverbal nom-marked subjects – the subject incorporation construction represents the most frequent construction of Earlier Egyptian, a largely VS language. In Earlier Egyptian, person markers and lexical noun phrases were in complementary distribution within the same clause, attaching directly to verb stems. As such, person markers are "pronominal" in the narrow sense, or "pro-indexes" in the sense of Haspelmath (2013), i.e., "person indexes" that cannot co-occur with conominals in the same clause.

In Later Egyptian, there began to emerge numerous periphrastic and auxiliary constructions, to which subject expressions attached, followed by lexical

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13 Differential Object Marking in Egyptian-Coptic, which began to emerge in Late Egyptian, developed from the convergence of a number of constructions, including an antiapplicative construction and a partitive-object construction. The accusative marker itself developed from the highly polysemous preposition m, which codes instrument, source, location, and a range of other functions. See Winand (2014, in this volume) for further details of the diachrony of the accusative marker from Late Egyptian to Coptic.

verbs. Coptic TAM auxiliaries represent, for the most part, highly grammatical-ized descendants of these auxiliaries.

Demotic (Johnson 1976: 97)

(22)   *bw.ir-msḥ*   *ṯзy*   *rmt*   *n-dmy*
       AOR.NEG-crocodile   catch man   MOD-town
       'A crocodile does not/cannot catch a local man.'

(23)   *bw.ir-f-ḫpr*

       AOR.NEG-3SGM-exist
       'It does not/cannot happen.'

Coptic (Shisha-Halevy 1988: 97)

(24)   ⲙⲉⲣⲉⲡⲉϥϩⲏⲧ   ϩⲓⲛⲏⲃ ⲛⲟⲩⲙⲉ
       mere-pef-hêt   *hinêb noume*
       AOR.NEG-his-heart   sleep really
       'His heart cannot really sleep.'

(25)   ⲙⲉⲕϩⲱⲡ   ⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩ
       me-k-hôp   *ero-ou*
       NEG.AOR-2SGM-hide   ALL-3PL
       'You cannot hide from them.'

As a result of these grammaticalization processes, lexical noun phrase subjects and person indexes became "trapped" within the verbal syntagm, rather than at its rightmost edge.

Since Earlier Egyptian, preverbal lexical subjects could be right-dislocated or topicalized, as an alternative order. However, there is no comparative frequency data for preverbal subjects in Earlier and Later Egyptian.

In contrast to the previous two constructions, the postverbal nominative marker is largely an innovation of Coptic, with vanishingly few examples in the previous stage of the language, Demotic. Another marker, written variously *in*, *n*, or *m*, was relatively infrequent (Mattha 1947). The frequency of postverbal sub-jects is vastly greater in Coptic than in any previous stage of the language.

The implications of these processes for understanding the history of the encoding of grammatical relations in Egyptian are significant. In a recent decon-struction of the concept of agreement, Haspelmath (2013) argues that the term "index" is more appropriate for describing bound person markers. The proposed typology of bound person markers distinguishes between three main types:

1. Pro-indexes: indexes that cannot co-occur with conominals
2. Cross-indexes: indexes with optional conominals
3. Gramm-indexes: indexes with obligatory conominals

In the latest stages of Egyptian-Coptic, one witnesses a sharp increase in the co-occurrence of person indexes and conominals, or in other words, a shift from pro-indexes to cross-indexes, due to a rise in the frequency of preverbal and post-verbal lexical arguments. However, since indexes can occur without conominals in all stages of Coptic (ca. 30% in the corpora checked here), there is no stage of the Egyptian-Coptic language in which one can speak of gramm-indexes.

Nonetheless, one observes a diachronic tendency for index + conominal as a discourse preference or "soft constraint", realized by the high text frequency of such constructions vis-à-vis subject incorporation.

6 No case before the verb in northeast Africa

Despite Africa's reputation as a caseless continent, König (2008; 2009) has argued that many African languages should in fact be described as case languages, whether case is realized by bound forms, free forms, or tone. This characterization assumes a broad definition of the comparative concept "case marker", similar to that adopted here

Northeast Africa, with Berber as a possible geographical outlier, is characterized by a robust generalization: preverbal core arguments show no case distinctions; the form that occurs preverbally is "always in one case form only, namely, the morphologically most unmarked one" (König 2008: 240). This generalization holds regardless of alignment type, since it holds for both "marked nominative" (e.g., Turkana, Nilo-Saharan) and ergative systems (e.g., Shilluk, Nilo-Saharan).

In Päri (West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan), which has a split ergative/ marked-nominative case system, pre-verbal A and P are in the absolute form, which does not have an overt case marker. On the other hand, post-verbal A and P show overt case markers.

(27) Päri (West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan; Andersen 1988)

    (a) *rìŋó ŋôl ùbúrr-ì ŋɔ́l-ɔ̀*
         meat cut Ubur-ERG cut-SUF
         'Ubur will cut the meat.'

(b) *ùbúr ŋùt-ò   kí rìŋó*
   Ubur cut.**CF.AP-SUF** **OBL** meat
   'Ubur will cut the meat.'

König's generalization trivially does not apply to the majority of accusative languages of northeastern African languages in her sample, since all but one of her accusative languages are verb-final; this fact renders the generalization irrelevant, since if the "no case before the verb" generalization were to hold for a verb-final language, it would not be considered a case language.
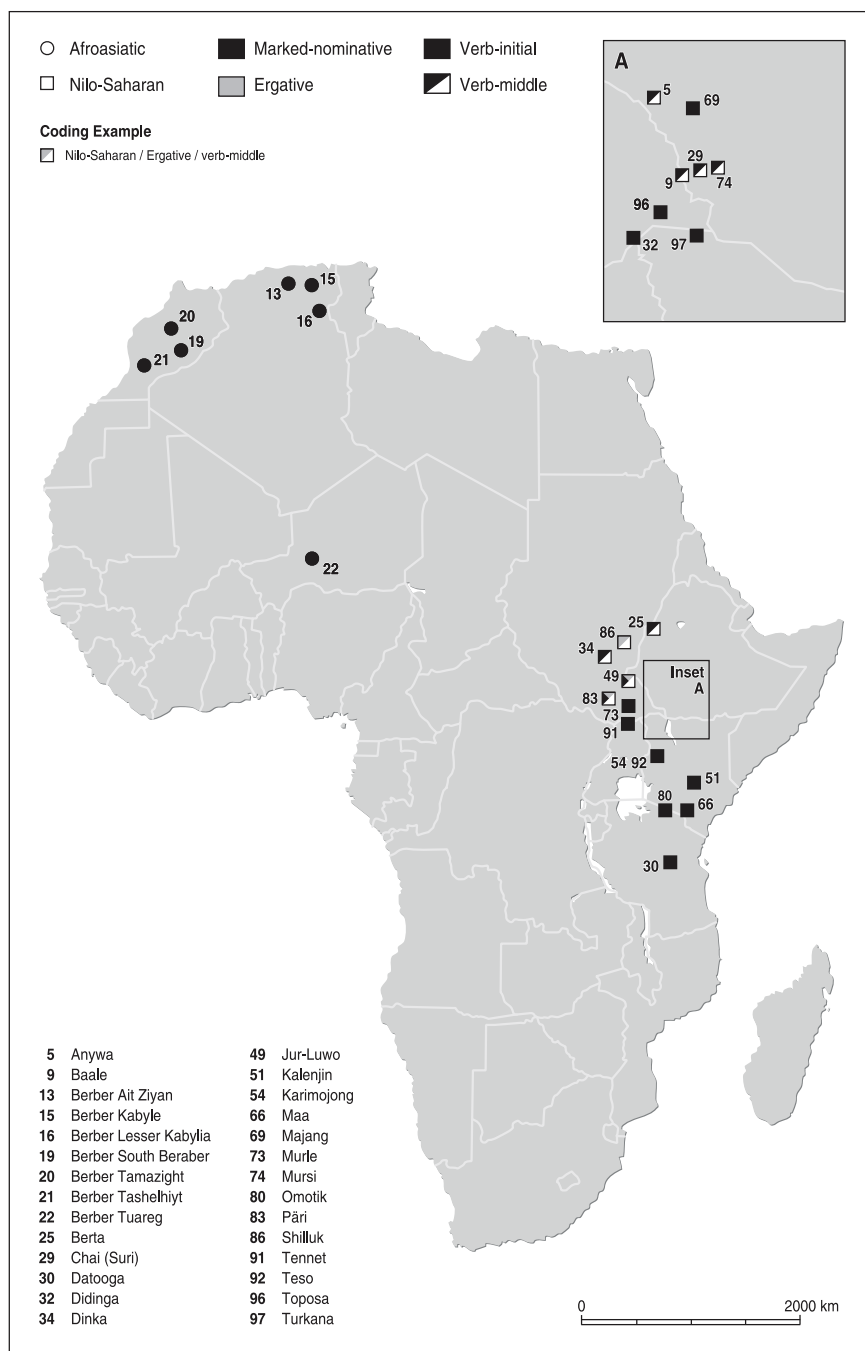
In many of the languages in König's sample, linear order is motivated by the information structural properties of referents in discourse. In Dinka (West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan, Andersen 1991; 2002), Nandi (Kalenjin, South Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan, König 2008: 260), Chai (Southeast Surmic, Nilo-Saharan, König 2008: 247), and Datooga (South Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan, König 2008: 261), preverbal arguments are topical. On the other hand, in Toposa (East Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan), Maa (East Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan, König 2008: 262; Payne 2013), and Tennet (König 2008: 262), preverbal arguments are generally focal. In Turkana (Nilo-Saharan), preverbal position can accommodate both topical and focal arguments (Dimmendaal 1983: 408; König 2008: 259). In Shilluk (Nilo-Saharan), it is postverbal arguments that are focal (König 2008: 243).

Kanuri (Saharan, Bondarev et al. 2011) Differential Subject Marking is motivated by the interaction of semantic and pragmatic features. The "nominative" marker *–ye* "is admissible providing they represent addressee-old information and occur with either transitive verbs/clauses or (if human) intransitive active verbs/clauses" (Bondarev et al. 2011).[14] This description is similar to that proposed for Coptic in this article.

7 Concluding remarks

As mentioned in the introduction, the goal of this article is a modest one: to draw attention to a grammatical feature that has hitherto gone unmentioned in most descriptions of Coptic: no case before the verb, obligatory case after the verb, although the Coptic facts would better be described as 'obligatory case after the verb, no case anywhere else'. From an areal point of view, this is not unexpected: Coptic closes the geographical gap, so to speak, between the main cluster of

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14 I would like to thank Denis Creissels for pointing out to me the relevance of Kanuri, and Dmitry Bondarev for sharing his work on the language with me.

○ Afroasiatic　　■ Marked-nominative　　■ Verb-initial

□ Nilo-Saharan　　■ Ergative　　◪ Verb-middle

Coding Example

◪ Nilo-Saharan / Ergative / verb-middle

A

5	Anywa	49	Jur-Luwo
9	Baale	51	Kalenjin
13	Berber Ait Ziyan	54	Karimojong
15	Berber Kabyle	66	Maa
16	Berber Lesser Kabylia	69	Majang
19	Berber South Beraber	73	Murle
20	Berber Tamazight	74	Mursi
21	Berber Tashelhiyt	80	Omotik
22	Berber Tuareg	83	Päri
25	Berta	86	Shilluk
29	Chai (Suri)	91	Tennet
30	Datooga	92	Teso
32	Didinga	96	Toposa
34	Dinka	97	Turkana

0　　　　　　　　　　2000 km

languages in which preverbal core arguments are not overtly flagged, in north-eastern Africa, and North African Berber languages, which have until now been considered a geographical outlier. This can be seen from König's map of "no case before the verb" languages in Africa (2008: 274).

Since this feature is so striking, it is interesting to consider why it has not been explicitly mentioned in descriptions. It may be due, at least in part, to the fact that many descriptions of Coptic do not gloss examples, so there is little need to decide on labels for descriptive categories. It probably also has something to do with the fact that Coptic is not typically described as a case language.

What is interesting about the Coptic case system is not the association of postverbal subjects with antitopic status, since this seems to be cross-linguistically well attested. Nor is it its three-way case system with overt nominative and accusative, neither of which is the citation form; similar systems are attested, albeit rarely, in, e.g., Korean, Japanese, and Kanuri. Nor is it the "no case before the verb, obligatory case after the verb" feature, which is typical of the broad area in which Coptic was spoken. Rather, it is the particular constellation of these features: an overt nominative marker which differs from both the accusative and the citation form, and which obligatorily marks highly accessible postverbal subjects.

Abbreviations

The glossing conventions here are in accordance with the Leipzig Glossing Rules, and the transliteration follows the Leipzig-Jerusalem transliteration system (Grossman & Haspelmath 2014, in this volume). The following are language-specific glosses.

AOR	aorist verb form
CONN	connecting particle
MOD	modifier marker

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