

## Taking Possession of the Constant Rate Hypothesis: Variation in Ancient Egyptian Possessives

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This first variationist study of ancient Egyptian examines variation between two possessive constructions in Middle (c. 2000 BC – 1350 BC) and Late (C. 1350 BC – 700 BC) Egyptian. The first is an older and socially prestigious variant, while the second is an innovative and socially stigmatized variant (Allen, 2010; Gardiner, 1957). The analysis is based on 1239 tokens from the *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* corpus, extracted from letters and official texts spanning over a millennium.

Egyptological philologists have claimed that the old variant was used only for official texts while the new variant was used only for vernacular texts (Polis, 2014; Allen, 2013; Junge, 2005), and that Late Egyptian had two distinct registers: one form for official texts that retained its Middle Egyptian features, like the old possessive variant, and one form for vernacular texts that used only Late Egyptian features, including the new possessive variant (Junge, 2005; Kammerzell, 2000). Contrary to these claims, I show that both variants appear throughout official and vernacular texts during the Late Egyptian period, although the new variant is disfavoured in official texts.

An extension of the Egyptological philologists' position also claims that these two registers are in fact different linguistic entities, and that because of this the rate of change (the rate of the spread of the new variant) in each register is different (Polis, in press; Junge, 2005). To test that claim, I modeled the data from both text types using logistic functions. The measure of the rate of change is the slope of the function; no matter how the time periods were divided – whether by broader time period or individual dynasties, I found that the slopes were the same for both text types. This supports the claim made in linguistics (Kroch, 1989) that language change occurs at the same rate across contexts – the Constant Rate Hypothesis – while contradicting the Egyptological claims that the rates of change should differ depending on the text type.

### References

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