

Old Egyptian Multiword Expressions consisting of a head word + *ib* “heart”

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Relevant UniDive working groups: WG1, WG2, WG3, WG4

1 Introduction

Egyptian is one of the longest lived languages in history. This Afroasiatic language knew the following phases: Old Egyptian (ca. 2700–2000 BC), Middle Egyptian (ca. 2000–1400 BC), Late Egyptian (ca. 1300–700 BC), Demotic (7th century BC to 5th century CE) and Coptic (4th to 14th century CE).¹ As some ancient languages, such as Biblical Hebrew,² and modern European languages, such as English, German and Spanish (see ex. 1), Egyptian uses the word “heart” with a metonymic meaning to form MULTIWORD EXPRESSIONS (MWEs). The aim of my research is to analyse Old Egyptian MWEs consisting of a head word + *ib* “heart” in order to understand the grammatical rules governing the formation of MWEs in Egyptian and to contribute to the study of universal rules concerning the formation of MWEs, one of the goals of UniDive.

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3 Keywords

Old Egyptian, *ib* “heart”, Multiword Expressions, NMWE, PMWE, VMWE, Idiom, Idiosyncrasy.

4 Concept

4.1 Contribution of the study of Old Egyptian MWEs to UniDive

The study of Old Egyptian MWEs containing the word *ib* “heart”, which are among the earliest attestations of MWEs in a cross-linguistic perspective, is an opportunity to check the validity of the “universal” categorization of MWEs based mostly on modern Indo-European languages. The identification of Old Egyptian MWEs with an idiosyncratic meaning will not only contribute to the understanding of intra-linguistic diversity, but also to the development and refinement of universal rules concerning the formation of MWEs.

4.2 The use of *ib* “heart” in Old Egyptian MWEs

The original meaning of the Egyptian noun *ib* is “heart” (see ex. 2). Due to Egyptian idiosyncrasy, *ib* also has the figurative meaning “seat of thoughts and emotions”, i.e. “mind”, “will” or “desire” (see ex. 3). In Old Egyptian, it was used to form MWEs by lexicalisation after a head word, be it a noun or adjective in a NOMINAL MULTIWORD EXPRESSION (NMWE),³ a preposition in a PREPOSITIONAL MULTIWORD EXPRESSION (PMWE)⁴ or a verb form in a VERBAL MULTIWORD EXPRESSION (VMWE).⁵ The earliest occurrences of MWEs containing *ib* are Early Dynastic Period names (2900–2730 BC) in NMWEs (ex. 4). 63 MWEs containing the noun *ib* are found in Old Egyptian texts and they figure in alphabetical order in my poster. The following types of MWEs containing the noun *ib* can be distinguished in Old Egyptian:

a) Two types of NMWEs:

- Noun/infinitive + *ib*, see ex. 5.
- Adjective/participle + *ib*, see ex. 6. This type corresponds to the Sanskrit construction known as *bahuvrīhi*.

b) PMWEs consisting of a preposition + *ib*, giving rise to complex prepositions, see ex. 7.

¹ Loprieno (1995), 5–8.

² Shupak (1985), 202–12.

³ For the concept of NMWE see Savary et al. (2023).

⁴ For the concept of PMWE see Baldwin/Kim, 278–279.

⁵ For the concept of VMWE see Savary et al. (2018), 96.

c) Two types of VMWEs consisting of a verb + *ib*:

- Light-verb constructions (LVCs), see ex. 3.
- Verbal idioms (IDs), see ex. 8.

Cases of quasi-universal categories, such as inherently reflexive verbs (IRefIVs) and verb-particle constructions (VPCs), are not found in Old Egyptian *ib*-VMWEs. However, an instance of a “balanced” sentence—an idiosyncratic structure of Egyptian grammar consisting of a pair of sentences with a similar structure—is attested with two verbal idioms containing the noun *ib* (ex. 10). It may be considered a case of *Other* verbal MWEs (OTH).





In Old Egyptian VMWEs, the noun *ib* could be used as a subject (ex. 8), a direct object (ex. 9), an adverbial modifier (exx. 3 and 10). If *ib* occurs as the subject of a VMWE, it follows the verb (8). If *ib* is the direct object of a VMWE, it follows the subject (ex. 9). If *ib* is the prepositional complement of a VMWE, it follows the verb and its subject (ex. 10).

4.3 Examples

(1)




- “Listen to your heart”
- (German:) Höre auf dein Herz.
- (Spanish:) Escucha a tu corazón.

(2)

			
<i>ib</i>	<i>≠k</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>≠k</i>
heart:M.SG.	=2SG.M	for:PREP	=2SG.M



lit.: “Your heart is for you.”
“Your heart belongs to you.”

(3)

			<i>(≠i)</i>
<i>ir</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>ib</i>	(=1SG)
act-IMP	according to: PREP	heart: (M.SG)	



“Act according to (my) will.”

(4)

	
<i>im²-</i>	<i>ib</i>
charming: PTCP (m.SG)	heart: (M.SG)




lit. “One-who-is-charming-of-heart (a name).”
“A-charming-one (a name).”

(5)

	
<i>nčm</i>	<i>ib</i>
sweetness-M.SG	heart-M.SG




lit. “Sweetness of heart.”
“Kindness.”

(6)

		
<i>h'k</i>	<i>ib</i>	<i>nb</i>
be hostile:PTCP(M.SG)	heart-M.SG	every-M.SG




lit. “Everyone who is hostile of heart.”
“Any evil-minded person.”

(7)

		
<i>hr</i>	<i>ib</i>	<i>Nw.t</i>
on- PREP	heart-M.SG	Nut-name





lit. “On the heart of Nut (the goddess of heaven).”
“Inside Nut (the goddess of heaven).”

(8)

		
<i>wč²</i>	<i>ib</i>	<i>≠k</i>
be hale- SBJV	heart: (M.SG)	=2SG.M






lit. “Your heart shall be hale.”
“You shall be happy.”

(9)

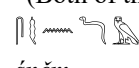




			
<i>ś:htp</i>	<i>≠f</i>	<i>ib</i>	<i>≠k</i>
satisfy:FUT	=3SG.M	heart-M.SG	=2SG.M

lit. “He will satisfy your heart.”
“He will satisfy you.”

(10)

				
<i>ś'w</i>	<i>≠f</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ib</i>	<i>≠f</i>
lengthen- FUT	=3SG.M	PREP to	heart: (M.SG)	=3SG.M

lit. “He will lengthen to his heart—
“(Both of them:) He will make him glad—

				
<i>śnčm</i>	<i>≠f</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ib</i>	<i>≠f</i>
make happy- FUT	=3SG.M	PREP to	heart: (M.SG)	=3SG.M

lit. He will make happy to his heart.”
He will give him pleasure.”

5 Preliminary results and work programme

The results of my research will be published in a paper in which the use of *ib* in Old Egyptian MWEs will be explained by analyzing ca. 120 examples selected from a corpus of over 350 instances. This analysis will help to establish the grammatical rules governing the formation of *ib*-MWEs. The next step will be finding other types of Old Egyptian MWEs in order to confirm the rules for the formation of *ib*-MWEs as well as to find other rules for the formation of MWEs in Old Egyptian. This will allow us to understand the function and meaning of MWEs in one of the oldest languages in the world.

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