

Desertscape and beyond: shifting borders of space conceptualization in Ancient Egypt.

0. Introduction

The present study proposes to investigate the evolution of classifier¹ use in relation to desertscape and of the related space conceptualization processes from two points of view: firstly, the extension of use of the sign  N25² – also well-known as logogram for the word *ḥ3s.t* ‘foreign/hilly land’ – in its classifier function from desertscape words to other semantic domains. Indeed,  N25 at first dedicated to the categories of DESERT and HILLY SPACE, became with time a superordinate classifier applying to any kind of FOREIGN space. In addition, it displays further extensions toward other domains. The study also investigates how cases of alternative³ and/or composed⁴ classification involving the sign  N25 result from a selection of semantic features considered as salient in the meaning of the lexeme in a given context.

Secondly, the other point that will be touched upon in this article is the apparition of classifiers in the spellings of words related to desertscape that were initially not part of their spelling. For example, the classifier  N23, associated to the category IRRIGATED LAND and extending toward the more general category (DELIMITED) SPACE started to appear in desertscape related lexicon. This shows their possible recategorization in some context as LIMIT/LIMINAL/DELIMITED SPACE, which was initially not featured of the semantics of these words. The apparition of the classifier  N23 in such lexicon stands as a complement in composed classification or/and alternative to  N25.

The focus will be placed on texts from the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, from the Ramses online database (Ramses) and the Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae corpora (TLA)⁵. This core corpus has been chosen to highlight the relation between the changes observed in relation to SPACE and DESERTSCAPE categories and a more general evolution of the classifier system.

Three starting questions will be our common thread for this study:

- 1) What are the cases in which one finds the  N25 desert classifier in a non-desert context? In other words, what are the semantic extensions toward other domains?

¹ Also called determinative in the Egyptological literature. Signs used in this function have a semantic value only.

² The codes refer to the Gardiner list.

³ Alternative classification follows the definition by Chantraine (2024) and refers to configuration in which, for a same lexeme used in the same sense, different classifiers are attested. The choice of the classifier can (but not must) express a specific connotation in relation to the co(n)text. It must be distinguished from distinctive classification, which applies to polysemy disambiguation using different classifiers for different senses of the lexeme. The difference between the two strategies can be simplified to some extent as connotation vs denotation.

⁴ Composed classification means that several classifiers are combined and allow for decomposing the meaning of the lexeme in specific semantic feature (one/several for each classifier). Most often, the different constituents of the group appear in the same order: from the end of the word, superordinate (general) + other classifier that gives a precision on the nature of the item within the larger category. It is also possible to simply have a composition of features, without a taxonomy. E.g. *sm3w.t* ‘tomb, grave’      combines  +  [CLOSED/INDOOR SPACE + (DELIMITED) SPACE].

⁵ Ramses online: <http://ramses.ulg.ac.be> ; TLA <https://thesaurus-linguae-egyptiae.de>. Last access for both: Sept. 29, 2024. Regarding Ramses data, I want to sincerely thank the project’s director for allowing me access to the core version of the database (including texts currently unavailable online).

- 2) For words that are not primarily written with 𓂏 N25, when does the 𓂏 N25 spelling occurs (as alternative or in composition)?
- 3) For words that are primarily written with 𓂏 N25, what are the cases in which these words take other classifiers (as alternative or in composition)?

1. Question 1: What are the cases in which one finds 𓂏 N25 in a non-desert context? In other words, what are the semantic extensions toward other domains?

The 𓂏 N25 classifier is found for words belonging to the DESERT domain but also for words that are directly or indirectly linked to desertscape through several trans-domain conceptual extensions. Part of this is no new information as it is well-known that 𓂏 N25 is attested with many different lexemes, which is the case for all superordinate level (SO) classifiers, i.e. very general categories, according to Goldwasser's taxonomy⁶. This is especially from the New Kingdom onwards, as SO classifiers become a very well-spread category, especially in hieratic texts.⁷

In the frame of the present study, a systematic search has been carried by the author on 𓂏 N25 in the Ramses database and in the TLA and the results were that the classifier applies to lexemes belonging to the following domains:

- Desert
- Mountains
- Funerary realm
- Foreign, outside of the Nile Valley or outside of Egyptian influence⁸
- Material from the desert
- Liminal or secluded/sacred space: it appears in toponyms for places that are at the fringe of the Valley (e.g. oases, the town of Elephantine)

Another classifier that will be repeatedly cited in this study is the classifier 𓂏 N23. It represents an irrigation channel, or perimeter irrigated by channels. It is naturally first used for lexemes that belong to the semantic field of irrigated/arable lands. However, when browsing through the list of lexemes written with 𓂏 N23, one also notices that another common denominator later appears, the feature of DELIMITED SPACE, or LIMIT OF SPACE – with interesting extensions toward the TIME domain, for highlighting the expression of a specific period of time (a 'portion' of time).⁹ Finally, the sign evolves into representing the SPACE category in a more general way.¹⁰

2. Question 2: For words that are not primarily written with 𓂏 N25, when does the 𓂏 N25 spelling occur (as an alternative classification¹¹ or in composition)?

⁶ Goldwasser 2002.

⁷ Chantraine 2014; 2021.

⁸ Cf. Cooper 2024.

⁹ Chantraine 2020; 2024.

¹⁰ Interestingly, one will also note that this palliates the lack of a dedicated lexeme for space.

¹¹ Alternative composition means that a same word with a same meaning can be written with several classifiers, depending on the selection of semantic feature made "within" the semantics of the lexeme (connotation as opposed to denotation). For example, *tttt* 'to argue', can be written with 𓂏 [OPPOSITION + SPEECH] or 𓂏 [OPPOSITION + ACTION].

Cases in which N25 is semantically motivated and adds a specific co(n)textual connotation.

In such case, alternative and/or composed classification are encountered, involving several different classifiers for a same lexeme in the same sense. A different selection is made among the semantic features that compose the meaning of the word, to reflect a specific connotation. It is on basis of this selection that the classifier is chosen.

dsr ‘sacred’ (Wb 5, 610-613.5)

The word *dsr* ‘sacred’ is usually written with  Y1,  Y1-G7. Exceptionally (one attestation in the present corpus), *dsr* is spelled with  N23, in the expression *hw.t dsr.t* ‘sacred temple’. The classifier  N23 is here likely chosen to highlight the fact that the quality *dsr* ‘sacred’ is in this context related to a delimited space, to the perimeter of the temple (and hence, also secluded).

Several attestations of *dsr* display the  N25 classifier. They have in common to be used to qualify a land or space-related term in general. One finds this spelling for example in *t3 dsr* ‘sacred land’ or *w3.t dsr.t* ‘sacred path’.

It is interesting to note that, in the investigated corpus, **not all attestations of [place + *dsr*] take  N25, but all spellings of *dsr* with  N25 relate to a place.**

This spelling of *sacred place* is systematized in the word *dsr.t* ‘Deir el-Bahari’. This word has  N25 as classifier most of the time and alternates in some cases with  Y1. In one attestation,  N25 is combined with  O1, likely in reference to the speos temple as CLOSED/INDOOR SPACE.

Ex. 1

jmy <sw> {st} n p3 w^cb nty m dsr.t   hn^c p3 nty m 3h-s.t

Give it to the wab-priest who is in Deir el-Bahari and to the one who is in Akh-Set (oCairo CG 25667, 4-5)¹²

In the case of the masculine word *dsrw*, also referring to Deir el-Bahari, there is a greater variety of spellings, with a larger panel of different semantic features being highlighted. Indeed, like for *dsr.t*, both  N25 and  O1 are attested. In the example below, it is the sign  N27 (setting sun) that appears in the spelling and evokes the location of the site (West) in relation to Luxor (*jpt-rsy.t*) on the other side of the Nile.

Ex. 2

jw=j hr hn.t [2c.] m hb nfr n jp.t-rsy.t m-mjtt r dsr(w)  

I rowed [] during the Beautiful Feast of Luxor as well as toward Deir el-Bahari. (Gurnah, tomb of Mahu, Urk. IV, 897, 3)

g3t-w3.t ‘narrow path’ (Wb 5, 152.18)

The lexeme *g3t-w3.t* (also transliterated *g3.w.t*) means ‘narrow path’. It is attested from the New Kingdom onwards and is not a very frequently used word (ca.13 attestations in our

¹² Černý 1930, pl. LXXI; Ramses ID 841.

corpus). It takes the sole classifier  N31 in a great majority of cases. However, on occasions, it is found combined with other classifiers:  N23 DELIMITED SPACE or  N25 DESERT/FOREIGN. A third example combines  O37 and  N25, without  N31. The presence of  O37 is likely to come from a copy mistake. Indeed, the whole spelling of the word is quite corrupted, and the presence of this sign could be a confusion between  N31 and  O37, based on the similar shapes of the two signs in hieroglyphic script.¹³

Ex.3

ss=sn dw.w šty.w g3-w3.w  *ksn.wt nswt-bjty wsr-m3^c.t-r^c stp.n-r^c*
They traversed mysterious mountains and difficult bottlenecks (Hittite Treaty of Ramses II, K27; KRI II 248, 2)¹⁴

The attestations of *g3.t-w3.t* with the  N25 spelling refer to narrow paths *in the mountains* or *in the desert*. In this case again,  N25 is thus a choice motivated by a reference to the landscape's topography. Regarding the attestations of *g3.t-w3.t* written with the classifier  N23, the choice is motivated by the wish to highlight the feature of DELIMITED SPACE (i.e. narrowness) in particular.

Ex. 4

t3 g3w.t  *nh3.tj m š3s.w k3p.w hry n3 b3.wt*
The pass is dangerous because of the *š3s.w*-Bedouins, hidden under the bushes (Hori, pAnastasi I, 23, 7)¹⁵

Finally,  N23 and  N25 can be combined, like in the example below from pAnastasi 1, where they are added to the repeater *w3.t*  N31.

Ex. 5

ntf=k p3 htr r sm3w t3 dr.t m hry-jb t3 g3.t-w3.t 
You must release the horses to repair the *dr.t* (drawbar?) in the middle of the bottleneck (Hori, pAnastasi I, 24, 6)¹⁶

j3.t “place, mound” (Wb 1, 26.9-15)

The word *j3.t* can be written with a large panel of classifiers, which do not always reflect a specific connotation (or at least, the connotation does not appear clearly from the context). The classifier  N25 is rarely attested in the spellings of *j3.t*. One example is this passage from the Necropolis Journal, which displays a quite unusual spelling, both for the use of  N25 and of the sign  D57 as radicogram for *j3.t* . The semantic feature highlighted here in the semantics of *j3.t* is HILLY, thus referring to the topographical characteristics of the mound and perhaps also to its SACRED/SECLUDED character, which is emphasized with  D57. Indeed, it is tempting to see a parallel between the use of  D57 as radicogram in the

¹³ They however do not look alike in hieratic, which seems to exclude a mistake from the misreading of a hypothetical hieratic draft.

¹⁴ Note that version I has the classifier N23 DELIMITED SPACE (KRI II, 248, 1).

¹⁵ Fischer-Elfert 1983; Ramses ID 1084.

¹⁶ Idem.

present case and its well-attested use as classifier for words that belong to the semantic field of TRANSGRESSION. The full reading of the group would thus be A PLACE THAT CANNOT BE TRANSGRESSED.

Ex. 6

[] *r-š3^c-m t3 s.t 3.t n pr-3 3.w.s nfry.t-r p3 k3mw [n nswt] jmn-htp 3.w.s p3 ntr 3 nfry.t-r t3 jn.t rsy.t r j3.t*  *n h3py 3*

[] from the great place of Pharaoh, l.p.h., to the garden of the king Amenhetep l.p.h., the great god, and to the southern valley, toward the mound of the great Hapy (pTurin cat. 1945 + 2073 + 2076 + 2082 + 2083, r° B1, 4)

The word *j3.t* is also found exceptionally with the classifier  O49 for URBAN/EGYPTIAN/WITHIN THE NILE VALLEY. The use of  O49 is here probably justified by the reference to the created organized world, assimilated to Egypt, and the boundaries thereof at the four cardinal points.

Ex. 7

my rk wn.n n=k jt=k gbb 3.wy [t3]
[jw=k m] j3.t   *rsy.t mhy.t jmnt.t j3bt.t*

Come, therefore, your father Geb, opened for you the two doors of the earth; you are (either) in] the southern and/or in the northern place, in the West and/or in the East! (pChester Beatty IX, r° 4, 6)¹⁷

These occurrences of  O49 and  N25 remain exceptional and the lexeme *j3.t* and its referent appear to be rather neutral as regards the opposition NILE VALLEY/NON NILE VALLEY. The usually attested classifiers for *j3.t* are rather the repeater  N30 and the classifier  N23 for delimited space. They can be used alone or combined. The latter,  N23, can also be preceded with  N27 in some cases.

Ex. 8

phr=k j3.t   *ntry.t m šmsw skr*

May you walk through the divine mound as follower of Sokar (Hori, oOxford Queen's College 1114, r° 5-6)¹⁸

Ex. 9

mtw=j h3^c h.t [r] ddw mtw=j d3f wsjr
mtw=j dj.t shd.tw p3 krsw nty htp m j3.t   *3.t*

I will set fire to Busiris, I will burn Osiris, I will cause the coffin that rests in the great mound to be placed upside down (Spell against scorpions, oDeM 1213, l. 7-10)¹⁹

Another (rare) alternative classification found for *j3.t* is the sign  O39 STONE, which is sometimes attested when *j3.t* refers to a sanctuary, as semantic extension from sacred place/mound. The presence of  O39 refers obviously to the sanctuary as built structure (made of stone).

¹⁷ Tacke 2013 ; Ramses ID 4744.

¹⁸ Fischer-Elfert 1983; Ramses ID 1772.

¹⁹ Posener 1952, pl. 48-48a; Ramses ID 5194.

Ex. 10

jw=n (r) šd=s m-dr.t p3 g3f nty (hr) sjp j(3).wt  *p3 j3n.w nty (hr) sjp wd3.t*

We will protect her from the monkey who inspects the sanctuaries and from the baboons who inspect the Udjat-eye. (Oracular amuletic decree, pTurin 1983, 101)²⁰

For the same nuance – referring to a sanctuary – one also finds *j3.ty* written with the classifier  O1, with selection of the semantic feature CLOSED/INDOOR SPACE. The classifier is written twice to express the dual.

Ex. 11

Jmn mnw m šh-ntr

Jmn mnw m j3.ty 

Jmn mnw m gbtw

Amon Min who is in the divine pavilion, Amon Min who is in Iaty²¹ (the two mounds), Amon Min is in Coptos (oTurin N 57090, r^o 4)²²

Interestingly, some spellings of *j3d.t* also feature another classifier:  N5, which stands for the TIME category²³. This is likely due to homophonic leading to homographic confusion²⁴ between *3.t* ‘moment’ (often written *j3d.t*)²⁵, *j3d.t* ‘meadow, field’²⁶ and *j3.t* ‘place, mound’. The latter two, *j3.t* and *j3d.t* are regularly used for one another and their semantics increasingly converge (place, mound, field). This semantic convergence likely finds its roots in a very similar pronunciation which eventually lead to an assimilation of their spellings.

Another case of classifier confusion due to homonymy is the presence of the sign  F37B in some rare spellings of *j3.t* ‘place, mound’, clearly influenced by the word *j3.t* ‘spine’ (Wb 1, 26.3-6).

Ex. 12

mtw=k dj.t jry.tw šhd n3 šn.w nty m t3y.w j3.t  *mj-ḳd p3 3h.t j.wn ns-mntw (hr) sk3=f*
(...) And you will lighten the plantations which are on their top (= the riverbanks) as well as the field that Nes-Mentu was ploughing (pLeiden I 370, v^o 8)²⁷

Cases in which the use of N25 is not semantically motivated

Finally, the use of  N25 is also sometimes a clear mistake based on its shape similarity with another sign or on a simple case of homonymy. The two cases are respectively illustrated in the examples below.

In a couple of cases, the sign  N25 is found where one would expect the sign  N26, as logogram for *ḳw* ‘mountain, hill’. In the present example from pAnastasi 1 (Hori),  N25 is used as logogram and augmented with the classifier  O39 for STONE/MADE OF STONE. In the preceding line, another instance of *ḳw* has the correct spelling with the sign  N26.

²⁰ Ramses ID 1101.

²¹ Jacquet-Gordon, 1962, 206.

²² Lopez 1978, pl. 38-38a; Ramses ID 3919.

²³ Goldwasser 2002, 14.

²⁴ Chantraine 2020.

²⁵ Wb 1, 1.12-2.2.

²⁶ Wb 1, 35.19-20.

²⁷ Černý 1939, VIII, 9-11.

Ex. 13

mtr wj my r dw  *n wsr*

p3y=f rš mj jh

Inform me please about the mountain of Weser; what is its peak like?

hpr p3 dw  *n skmm tnw*

Where does the mountain of Sekemem lead (lit: become, turn into)? (Hori, pAnastasi 1, 21, 6)²⁸

Another attested mistake is a simple classifier confusion between two homonyms, without any specific connotation nor pun intended.

As an example, *hr.t* ‘sky’ (Wb 3, 143.9-10) is sometimes written with  N25, likely influenced by the spelling of *hr.t* ‘necropolis’ (Wb 3, 143.13-19). In this case, it is most probably a simple influence of the latter on the former. Indeed, in none of these examples the  N25 classifier seems to express a specific connotation that would require  N25.

Ex. 14

hrw sgb r hr.t   *jw mn w^c wšb*

The voice screams to the sky, and there is no one to answer (pBoulaq 6, r° VII, 8)²⁹

As for *hr.t* necropolis, it is in most cases written with the classifier  N25 but an alternative spelling with  O1 instead is also attested, referring to a tomb as INDOOR SPACE.

Ex. 15

[d]d.n [p3] imy-r(3) hsy.w³⁰ nty m t3 hr.t   *n sš pj3y [dd=f]*

The chief of the singers, who is in the tomb of the scribe Piay, spoke; he said (...) ³¹

3. Question 3: Spellings 2: For words that are primarily written with N25, what are the cases in which these words take other classifiers (as alternative or in composition)?

In this section, we must start with mentioning the well-known opposition between  N25 DESERT/OUTSIDE NILE VALLEY/FOREIGN/OUTSIDE EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE and  O49 URBAN/NILE VALLEY/EGYPTIAN/UNDER EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE. A very good summary of the state of the art regarding this opposition is given by Cooper, following Lincke and Spalinger.³² One important feature to note here is that, among the many toponyms referring to a reality outside Egypt or outside the direct Nile Valley area, a majority are written with the classifier  N25, increasingly grouped with  T14 from the New Kingdom onwards. This latter sign has been shown by Allon³³ to be a meta-semantic indicator for marking a term (a) of foreign origin or (b) referring to a foreign entity (item, people, place).

²⁸ Fischer-Elfert 1983; Ramses ID 1772.

²⁹ Koenig 1981; Ramses ID 1256.

³⁰ *jmy-r(3) hsy.w* is written 

³¹ Lichtheim 1945; TLA, sentence ID IBUBd8DIQumkKkgZmMCWCXTFsOw.

³² Cooper 2024; Lincke 2015, Spalinger 2008.

³³ Allon 2010.

For example, the toponym *jrs* Alasiya (Cyprus) is written twice with $\otimes$ O49 in addition to the group 𐎶𐎵𐎶 , in Wenamun.

EX. 16

$jw p^3 t^3 w (hr) hw.t \leq j > r p^3 t^3 n jrs$

Kpny ‘Byblos’ is sometimes written with ☉ O49 in addition to 𓆎 N25, a spelling that appears only in Wenamun for the texts belonging to the corpus under consideration (New Kingdom – Third Intermediate Period). The addition of this classifier conveys the idea that Byblos is part of the Egyptian area of influence, even though it remains a foreign land. This application of the classifier is obtained through semantic extension drawn from the initial domain of ☉ O49 URBAN/EGYPTIAN/WITHIN THE NILE VALLEY to a more abstract concept of world conceptualization, which can also include the subjectivity of the speaker in some cases.³⁶

$jw p3 [wr] n kpny \square \in \mathbb{N} \left| \begin{array}{c} \text{crown} \\ \text{circle} \end{array} \right| \otimes (hr) h3b n=j r\text{-}dd j.rwj twk m t3y=j mry.t$

All occurrences of the word *kpn*y ‘Byblos’ in Wenamun are written with the group 𓂏𓂛𓂏 , with the exception of the last one in the text, which has only 𓂏𓂛 . This particularity in the classifier economy of the text is in my opinion a meaningful variation. Indeed, this specific mention of Byblos takes place in the narrative when Wenamun reaches the land of Alasiya (Cyprus) and evokes the crew sent by the Prince of Byblos. At this point of the storyline, it is not the author’s intention anymore to have the character of Wenamun include Byblos in the ‘great Egypt’ as was the case before when the latter was trying to convince Tjekerbaal of the authority of Egypt over Byblos and of giving him (for free!) the wood needed for the barge of Amun. In this specific passage, the scribe has written the word *kpn*y ‘Byblos’ without the addition of 𓂏 O49 present in other occurrences of the word in this text. As a result, he is not stressing anymore the feature ‘under Egyptian influence’ that characterizes Byblos elsewhere

37 *Idem.*

in the text. Instead, the focus is now something else: while Wenamun is seeking the protection of the Princess of Alasiya, two elements of international law are conveyed to the reader through his discourse: the right to shipwreck, and the diplomatic immunity conferred to Wenamun by his ambassador status.³⁸

Ex. 18

jr t3y js.t n p3 wr n kpny  *nty st (hr) wh3 hdb=s{w}*

For this crew of the Prince of Byblos that one tries to kill (won't its master find then crews of yours)? (pMoscow 120, 2, 83 = LES 75, 15)

In oracular texts from the 21st – 22nd dynasty, it is common to find long lists of ethnonyms and toponyms that are used in complementary opposition with Egypt and Egyptians. They represent symbolically the 'prototypical foreigner and enemy' in the Egyptians' world view.³⁹ These enumerations are meant to provide universal effectiveness to the protective spell.

In the example below, all ethnonyms and toponyms are written with the extended group , except for *km.t* Egypt, written with the sole . They are thus all seen as being under Egyptian influence, but still considered as foreign with respect to the land of Egypt.

Ex. 19

jw=j (r) šd=s r hk3 h3rw  *r hk3 <n> kš*  *r hk3 [] r hk3 <n> šsw*
 *r hk3 pjt*  *r hk3 <n> rmt km.t* 

I will protect her from the magic of Syria, from the magic of Kush, from the magic of [], from the magic of Bedouins, from the magic of Lybia, from the magic of the people of Egypt (...)
 (pBM 10308, 34-39)⁴⁰

Case of N25 replaced with O49

A rare case of *dšr.t* 'desert' written with  O49 instead of  N25 is attested in the Great Sphinx Stela. This classifier variation highlights the action of the king, who turned desert into administrated land. The two classifiers are used in the same text, highlighting the status change of the land *dšr.t* (the other attestation is written with  N25, in contextual association with *km.t*, written with  O49 (Urk. IV, 1278, 18).

Ex. 20

hpr.n=f dšr.t  *b3k=s*

He administrated the desert and its exploitation (Urk. IV, 1277, 11)

Some instances of composed classification: N23 + N25 in 'East' (*j3bt.t* Wb 1, 30.15) and 'West' (*jmnt.t* Wb 1, 86.1-14)

The two lexemes *j3bt.t* and *jmnt.t* are written with  N25 as primary classifier. In most cases, it is used alone. However, composed classification and alternative classification are also attested.

³⁸ The presence of these elements in Wenamun was first suggested by De Spens (1998).

³⁹ Chantraine 2019.

⁴⁰ Edwards 1960, 23-25; Ramses ID 1083.

The sign  N25 is by far the most attested classifier for both lexemes. However, some attestations of the lexemes are written with  N23 instead. In this case, there seem to be a semantic extension from a classifier that reminds the topography of the west and east hilly desert, outside of the Nile valley, toward the notion of LIMIT or LIMINAL SPACE, actualized in a more generic way by  N23.

In the example below, *jmnt.t* west is written with  N25, while the other cardinal points are written with  N23. In a general way, one can notice a larger presence of  N25 in the spelling of *jmnt.t* in contrast to the other cardinal points. This can be explained by the topography and the desertic nature of the West bank, but also by its association to the realm of the dead.

Ex. 21

jr jy=k hr=j m jmnt.t  *j3bt.t*  *mh.t*  *rsy* 

if you come against me, in the west or the east, north or south (oAshmolean 300, r^o 9)⁴¹

The increasing presence of the classifier  N23 in the spellings of the cardinal points lexemes from the New Kingdom onwards is likely due to several factors. The first one is a general tendency to composed classification in New Kingdom hieratic.⁴² The second one is that the feature LIMIT/LIMINAL/DELIMITED seems to be highlighted, which appears as a natural development since cardinal points have an important role in space conceptualization and representation. The LIMIT feature is actualized with both  N25 and  N23, with an initial dichotomy DESERT vs IRRIGATED LAND. However, with time, the LIMIT expressed by  N23 becomes non-marked (i.e. applying to any limit or portion of space and even applying to other domains, like TIME⁴³) and  N25 remains the marked term of the pair (applies to a limit of space, in desert/foreign context). The semantic loss goes even one step further for  N23 as it ultimately becomes a general classifier for space, without the feature LIMIT/LIMINAL/DELIMITED being salient.

A case of alternative classification: *jn.t* ‘valley’ (Wb I, 93, 2-14)

The word *jn.t* is mainly found written with two classifiers:  N25, which clearly refers to the topography of the valley and  O39, which expresses a semantic selection on a material found in mountain valleys and is also a reference to the tombs built in it.

Ex. 22

hrw n pA wdn j.jr=k n jmn m Hb jn.t  

the day of the offering that you made for Amun during the festival of the Valley (oDeM 127, v^o 2)⁴⁴

⁴¹ Černý & Gardiner 1957, 24, pl. XCI.1; Ramses ID 5342.

⁴² Chantraine 2021; 2024.

⁴³ Chantraine 2020, 2024.

⁴⁴ KRI III, 557, 9-13.

Ex. 23

smnh s.t=k nty m t3 jn.t  *dw3.t h3p h3.t=k*

Improve your place which is in the valley, the Duat that hides your corpse (Ani, pBoulaq 4, 17, 14)⁴⁵

The same spelling with  O39 is also systematically attested in the tale of the Two Brothers when mention is made of the Cedar Valley. In this case, it does not seem to bear a specific semantic connotation. Indeed, if a semantic selection on the material ‘stone’ found in the valley likely motivated the appearance of this spelling in the first place, this does not mean that every attestation of *jn.t* spelled with  O39 necessarily actualizes this connotation.

Ex. 24

jw=j r sm.t r t3 jn.t  *p3 ʕš*

I will go to the Cedar Valley (Two Brothers, pOrbiney 7, 2 = LES 16, 6)⁴⁶

Interestingly, the classifiers  N25 and  O39 do not seem to be used together in a same group in the spelling of *jn.t*. When searching for attested combinations including  O39, one also quickly notices that it is very rarely combined with other signs in classifier function. One group is attested a few times,  T30 +  O39, for lexemes in the semantic field of stone and working the stone. For example:  *ds* ‘silex, knife’ (Wb 5, 485.16-486.6),  *ht* ‘seal’ (Wb 3, 348.14-15),  *htj* “to carve” (Wb 3, 347.16-348.12).

Finally, one occurrence of *jn.t* combining  N25 and  N23 has been found in the corpus, in the oDeM 1067. The reason for the presence of  N23 is not clear and there is no clue of a specific connotation being conveyed. One simple explanation could be the influence of the word *r-bnr* that appears before in the sentence and is also spelled with  N23, or just the general recurrence of this group in the Ramesside hieratic texts.

Ex. 25

jmy n=s Dr.t=k Tsy=s {H}r-bnr 

 *aA n jn.t*  *pA jmw aA n nAy nmH.w nty Hr jsq* 

Give her your hand so that she can raise outside,  the great  of the valley, the great boat *jmw* of these poor peoples who are late  (oDeM 1067, a, 5)⁴⁷

4. Conclusions

The use of  N25 evolves through time, and the sign is more often used in composed classification from the Ramesside period onwards. The panel of its associated semantic features is shared with  N23 in a complementary opposition where  N25 always remains the marked term (LIMIT + DESERT/FOREIGN SPACE) and  N23 is the non-marked term (limit/delimited). The latter evolves even further into two directions to express (1) LIMIT/DELIMITED only (and therefore can apply to other domains, like time) and (2) the

⁴⁵ Quack 1994; Ramses ID 450.

⁴⁶ Ramses ID 2.

⁴⁷ Posener 1938, 17-18; pl. 37-37a, 38-38a; Ramses ID 1709.

expression of SPACE only (without the feature LIMIT being salient). Its varied combinations with other classifiers express the flexibility of selection that can be made on lexeme's semantic features to express specific connotations. Indeed, besides the well-known fundamental opposition between  N25 and  O49,  N25 is attested in *combination*, *alternance* and *complementary distribution* with several recurring classifiers.

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