

On the Phonetic Change between “g” and “h” in the Egyptian Language

By Stefan Bojowald*

In this contribution, a new investigation of the Egyptian phonetic change between “g” and “h” is offered. The question was tackled in previous research only sporadically. The topic is being examined here for the first time on a larger scale. The phonetic change is one of the rarer Egyptian phenomena of this kind. The material amassed in this article consists of four new examples. Completeness was attempted, but possibly not achieved. Therefore, more examples may be added in the future. The beginning of the phonetic change can be dated to the Old Kingdom. The phonetic change can be determined from both “g” to “h” and “h” to “g”. Examples for the second variant are in the majority. The phenomenon has parallels in many oriental languages.

Keywords: *Egyptian philology – Egyptian phonology – phonetic change between “g” and “h”*

Introduction

In this contribution, the Egyptian phonetic change between “g” and “h” is highlighted once again. The search for further tangible evidence of its historical evidence is the top priority. The initially perhaps somewhat strange impression of the phonetic change can hopefully be reduced in this way. The study of this phonetic change is also of interest to neighbouring disciplines. The same phenomenon recurs in other Afro-Asiatic languages. The following results are therefore also of comparative value.

The Egyptian Material

Previous research has already dealt with this phenomenon several times without being there a broader investigation. The following overview explains the more precise details:

The earliest comments on this phenomenon apparently come from Edel (1955, 53), who concentrated on the writing “ng3g3” for “nh3h3” “breast flow over“. The phonetic change occurs here in the middle of the word. The example can be dated into the Old Kingdom.

*Lecturer, University of Bonn, Germany.

The discussion was then taken up by Westendorf (1989, 76/1962, 350), who referred to the relationship of “wbg” – “wbh” “to light”, “pḥ3” – “pg3” “to split, to open” and “fnḥ” – “png” “to split, to open”. The phonetic change appears here in the middle and at the end of the word. The phenomenon is apparently understood by Westendorf between the lines as an explanation for root doublets.

In later scientific literature, things became relatively quiet regarding this phonetic change. The current moment is therefore just right for a renewed analysis. In what follows, four fresh Egyptian examples are presented, which are beyond any suspicion of coincidence or scribe’s error¹. On superficial inspection, the amount may not be very high for far-reaching conclusions. At this point, however, Schenkel’s (1993, 147) beautiful statement that one secure piece of evidence is worth more than a thousand uncertain pieces of evidence definitely deserves attention. Although the words appear originally in a different context, they can easily be transferred to the current case. For better orientation, the examples are presented in chronological order.

The point of departure for the following considerations is the Egyptian rendering “iniwg3ś3” (Urk. IV, 704, 6; for this passage cf. Edel, 1979, 84) for the country name “Nuḥašše”, whose geographical location on the map of the Middle East extends over the north of today’s Syria east of the Orontes². The phonetic change occurs here in the middle of the word. In this case, it takes place from “ḥ” to “g”. The other sound phenomena in this word are not so important here and can therefore be ignored. The example can be dated to the New Kingdom. .

The word “ḥbś” (Černý 1965, § 59) follows next, which is apparently a vessel or container name. Breyer (2011, 86/2010, 449) believes to have found the etymology of the word in the Hittite “^{DUG}tagapisa”³ “a vessel”, so that it would meet the phonetic criteria for inclusion in this article. The phonetic change can be detected here in the middle of the word. In this example, it occurs from “g” to “ḥ”. The Hittite model is, however, not the only possibility for the solution of this question. The same word is deduced by Hoch (1994, 362) from the Semitic root “ḥbš” “to bind” and by Ward (1989, 73-82; for Hurrian loan words in Egyptian cf. Schneider 2004, 137-138) from the Hurrian root “taḥapšu” “leather strap”. If the last two options apply, the example would be omitted for the considerations here. The first alternative is considered more likely here. The example can be dated to the New Kingdom as well.

¹The emendation of “g” in “ḥ” at Grunert 2008, 139, is probably based on other prerequisites and is therefore not taken into account here. The relationship of “g” and “ḥ” at Quack 2019, 102, is also on a different level and does not need to be considered here.

²For the “Nuḥašše”-lands cf. Klengel 1999, passim; Klengel 1998-2001, 610-611; Bryce 2009, 515.

³For this word cf. Tischler 2001, 160.

The Egyptian writing “krǵp3” for the queen’s name Gilu-ḥepa known from EA 17, 5 should be mentioned next, in which the representation through “g” could be a sign of voicing the “ḥ” (Edel 1963, 34). The explanation of the phenomenon eluded Edel according to his own words. The phonetic change investigated here would create a good base for interpretation. The name is borrowed from Hurrian onomastics, but should not have any serious consequences. In this case it is rendered in hieroglyphic transcription. The daughter of the Mittani king Shuttarna II. married into the harem of Amenhotep III. The phonetic change takes place here in the middle of the word again. In this case, it develops from “ḥ” to “g”. The example can be dated to the New Kingdom.

The writing “śǵ3” (Lefebvre 1923, 50) for “śḥ3” “to remember” fits well as a fourth new discovery, which probably also reveals the influence of this phonetic change. In this case it was executed in the middle of the word. The process can be observed from “ḥ” to “g”. The example can be dated to the Graeco-Roman period. The tomb of Petosiris, from whose inscriptions the word originates, stands out for its mixed Egyptian-Greek style.

The indirect proof of the phonetic change could also be achieved by the fact that Semitic “ʿ” could be shifted either to “g” or “ḥ” in Egyptian (Westendorf 1977, 507). The parallelism therefore indicates a certain sound similarity between the two phonemes. The argument should be taken seriously.

The whole thesis can be supported by the following factor: the Egyptian language apparently knows the phonetic change between “ḥ” and “k” (Westendorf 1962, 37; Lüddeckens 1943, 122; Satzinger 1999, 147; Vycichl 1958, 387; cf. also the writing “śk3” “to plough” for “śḥ3” “to remember” at Töpfer/Müller-Roth 2011, 51). The close relationship between those two phonetic changes is noticeable at first glance. The missing link is the phonetic change between “g” and “k”, who enjoys general notoriety (Jasnow/Zauzich 2005, 89; Jasnow 1992, 106).

Material in other Oriental Languages

The existence of the phonetic change between “g” or “ḥ” is, by the way, secured by external factors. Interestingly, the Egyptian language is not isolated with this phenomenon. On the contrary, the phonetic change between “g” and “ḥ” is also attested in other oriental languages. The law can thus be placed in a broader context. The double and triple protection also helps to refute possible objections. The loose list below is intended to serve as an initial overview.

The Akkadian language is placed at the beginning. The phonetic change between “ḥ” and “g” can be observed there in Late-Babylonian words, who could be under Aramaic influence (von Soden 1995, 31).

The reproduction of the name ^mTudḥaliya in Ugaritic alphabetic script by “tdḡl” (Hoffner, Jr./ Melchert 2008, 39) obviously shows the same cause.

The realisation of Protosemitic “*/ḡ/” through “h” in Amorritic (Streck 2000, 231; for the Amorritic onomastikon cf. Golinets 2018, passim; Bojowald 2021, 137-141; Bojowald 2022, 287-290) aims in the same direction.

The allophon „[ḡ]“ (Wegner 2007, 46; for Hurrian cf. Neu 1988, passim) for /h/ and /ḥh/, respectively, in Hurrian could also belong in this series.

The phonetic change between “g” and “h” seems to appear in Luwian as well (Hawkins/Morpurgo Davies 1993, 50-60; for the Greek-Anatolian relationship in the case of “Perge” and “Pegasos” cf. Hutter 1995, 79-97).

Conclusion

The final conclusion is as follows: The probability of the Egyptian phonetic change between “g” and “h” has become more concrete through the above observations. The phenomenon can be detected according to the material known so far in the middle and at the end of the word. The beginning of the word remained unaffected by this phonetic change in the current state of things. The duration of the phonetic change can be traced throughout almost the entire history of the language. The base for the phonetic change between “g” and “h” thus has been further enlarged. Through the oriental parallels it can be placed in a larger context. The Egyptian type is definitely worth keeping an eye on. The explanation for the phonetic change can be sought in the voicing/devoicing of the two consonants.

References

- Bojowald S (2021) *Noch einmal zu Nehesi*, ZDPV 137/2, 137-141.
 Bojowald S (2022) *Zum amurritischen Lexikon – Ein Nachtrag*, ZDPV 138/2, 287-290.
 Breyer F (2010) *Egyptological Remarks concerning daḥamunzu*, Ä+L 20, 445-451.
 Breyer F (2011) *Hethitisches im Grab des Tutanchamun*, in: M. Collier/St. Snape (Eds.), *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen*, Bolton.
 Bryce T (2009) *The Routledge Handbook of The People and Places of Western Asia: The Near East from the Early Bronze Age to the Fall of the Persian Empire*, London & New York.
 Černý J (1965) *Hieratic Inscriptions from the tomb of Tutankhamen, Tutankhamen's Tomb Series II*, Oxford.
 Edel E (1955) *Altägyptische Grammatik I*, AnOr 34, Rom, 1955.
 Edel E (1963) *Zur Schwurgötterliste des Hethitervertrags*, ZÄS 90, 31-35.
 Edel E (1979) *Zwei ägyptische Ortsbezeichnungen*, Or 48, 82-90.
 Golinets V (2018) *Das amurritische Onomastikon der altbabylonischen Zeit, Band 2: Verbalmorphologie des Amurritischen und Glossar der Verbalwurzeln*, AOAT 271/2, Münster.

- Grunert S (2008) *Nur für Erwachsene – political correctness auf Altägyptisch?* Neue Lesungen und Interpretationen der biographischen Inschrift des Gaufürsten Henqu, SAK 37.
- Hawkins JD, Morpurgo Davies R (1993) *Running and Relatives in Luwian*, Kadmos 32, 50-60.
- Hoch JE (1994) *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period*, Princeton.
- Hoffner Jr HA, Melchert HC (2008) *A Grammar of the Hittite Language, Part 1, Reference Grammar, Languages of the Ancient Near East 1*, Winona Lake.
- Hutter M (1995) *Der luwische Wettergott pihaššašši und der griechische Pegasos*, in: M. Ofitsch/C. Zinko (Hrsg.), *Studia Onomastica et Indogermanica*, Festschrift für F. Lochner von Hüttenbach zum 65. Geburtstag, *Vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft* 9, Graz, 79-97.
- Jasnaw R (1992) *A Late Period Hieratic Wisdom Text* (P. Brooklyn 47.218.135), SAOC 52, Chicago.
- Jasnaw R, Zauzich KT (2005) *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thot, A Demotic Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the classical Hermetica*, Volume I: Text, Wiesbaden.
- Klengel H (1999) *Geschichte des hethitischen Reiches*, Leiden.
- Klengel H (1998-2001) *Nuḫašše*, in: D.-O. Edzard u. a. (Hrsg.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* Band 9, Berlin.
- Lefebvre G (1923) *Le tombeau de Petosiris, Troisième Partie, Vocabulaire et Planches*, Le Caire.
- Lüddeckens E (1943) *Untersuchungen über religiösen Gehalt, Sprache und Form der ägyptischen Totenklagen*, MDAIK 11, Berlin.
- Neu E (1988) *Das Hurritische: Eine altorientalische Sprache in neuem Licht*, *Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur*, Jahrgang 1988 Nr. 3, Mainz-Stuttgart.
- Quack JF (2019) *Isis, Thot und Arian auf der Suche nach Osiris*, in: J. Fr. Quack/K. Ryholt, *Demotic Literary Texts from Tebtunis and Beyond*, Text, CNI Publications 36, The Carlsberg Papyri 11, Copenhagen.
- Satzinger H (1999) *Egyptian aAyin in variation with D*, *LingAeg* 6.
- Schenkel W (1993) *Zu den Verschluss- und Reibelauten im Ägyptischen und (Hamito-) Semitischen: Ein Versuch zur Synthese der Lehrmeinungen*, *LingAeg* 3, 137-149.
- Schneider T (2004) *Hurrisch ḫiaroḫḫe „Goldenes“ als Fachterminus im Ägyptischen*, in: G. Takács, *Egyptian and Semito-Hamitic (Afro-Asiatic) Studies in Memoriam W. Vycichl*, *Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics*, Volume XXXIX, Leiden-Boston, 137-138.
- von Soden W (1995) *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik*, 3., ergänzte Auflage, unter Mitarbeit von Werner R. Mayer, AnOr 33, Rom.
- Streck MP (2000) *Das amurritische Onomastikon der altbabylonischen Zeit*, Band 1: Die Amurriter, Die onomastische Forschung, Orthographie und Phonologie, Nominalphilologie, AOAT 271/1, Münster.
- Tischler J (2001) *Hethitisches Handwörterbuch*, Mit dem Wortschatz der Nachbarsprachen, Innsbruck.
- Töpfer S, Müller-Roth M (2011) *Das Ende der Totenbuchtradition und der Übergang zum Buch vom Atmen, Die Totenbücher des Monthemhat (pTübingen 2012) und der Tanedjmet (p.Louvre N. 3085)*, Mit Farbtafeln auf CD-Rom, HAT 13, Wiesbaden.

- Vycichl W (1958) *Grundlagen der ägyptisch-semitischen Wortvergleiche*, MDIK 16, Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Professor Dr. Hermann Junker, II. Teil, 1958
- Ward WA (1989) *Egyptian thbš: A Hurrian Loanword in the Vernacular of Deir el-Medineh*, GM 109, 73-82.
- Wegner I (2007) *Hurritisch*, Eine Einführung, 2. überarbeitete Auflage, Wiesbaden.
- Westendorf W (1962) *Grammatik der medizinischen Texte, Grundriss der Medizin der Alten Ägypter VIII*, Berlin.
- Westendorf W (1977) *Das strandende Schiff, Zur Lesung und Übersetzung von Bauer B 1, 58=R 101*, in: J. Assmann/E. Feucht/R. Grieshammer (Hrsg.), *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur*, Studien zum Gedenken an Eberhard Otto, Wiesbaden, 503-509.
- Westendorf W (1989) *Bemerkungen und Korrekturen zum Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Göttingen.