Adjectives and Prepositions

The main functions of adjectives are to follow and modify nouns and noun phrases, and to stand by themselves as nouns. Adjectives have gender and number in agreement with the nouns or noun phrases that they modify. (The feminine plural is usually not indicated except sometimes the plural strokes are shown.) There are three categories of adjectives: primary, secondary and derived nisbe adjectives. There is only one primary adjective: 

\[ nb \] “every, all.”  

The secondary adjectives are the generic adjectives such as 

\[ ikr \] “excellent,” 

\[ m\dot{\text{wi}} \] “new,” and 

\[ nfr \] “good, beautiful.” Nisbes can be derived from nouns and prepositions.

Examples for the use of the primary adjective:

\[ (n)swt \ nb \] “any king” [Kanais A];

\[ h\dot{k}\dot{w} \ nb \] “all magic” [Irtysen Stela 7];

\[ zp \ nb \] “every deed” [Kanais B, 8] with the threshing floor biliteral \[ zp \];

\[ b\dot{t} \ nb \] “everything” [Pr. II, 7];

\[ ntrw \ nbw \] “all gods” [Kanais A];

\[ t\dot{b}w \ nbw \] “every land” [Kanais B, 1];

\[ wrw \ h\dot{swt} \ nb \] “all the nobles/princes (lit. great ones) of the foreign lands” [Urk. IV, 612, 12];

\[ mn\dot{m}\dot{n}t\dot{t} \ nb \] “all (kinds of) cattle” [Semna Stela I, 3] in which the plural strokes of the feminine collective noun \[ mn\dot{m}nt \] “cattle” are replaced by three signs of cattle.

\[ 1 \text{ Note that } nb \text{ as a noun means “lord, master, owner.”} \]
iAw t dSr “red mounds” [Kamose Stela 2, 17] with the mound and shrubs ideogram (and determinative) 𓊀𓊀. In sporadic cases such as this the feminine plural is indicated by plural strokes. The evil bird determinative is because this is the pharaoh’s threat to burn down the settlements of his enemies.

rmTt nbt “all mankind” [Urk. IV, 1, 17] showing the collective form of rmT “people” with feminine t ending.

More complex examples: mnw m r-pr w n tr w nb “monuments in the temples of all the gods.” r-pr is an Egyptian expression for “temple, chapel, shrine.”

HAw t sn iAwt sn nbt m nwt m st “all their fields and mounds in town and in the countryside.”

Examples for secondary adjectives:

zp nfr “good deed” [Neferti 7];
mniw nfr “good shepherd” [Kanais A] (Middle Kingdom epithet of a pharaoh) with the ideogram (and determinative) mniw “herdsman;”

śmsw ikr “excellent follower” [ShS. 1];

nb t B dṣr “lord of the Sacred Land,” epithet of the gods Anubis or Wepwawet (the location refers to the cemetery at Abydos);

k3 nḥt “victorious/mighty bull” (epithet of a pharaoh) [Kanais A] with nḥt “victorious” only indicated by variant determinative;

wṣt nfr “good road” [Kanais A];

ḥwt-ntr mṣwt “new temple” [Kanais A] (with honorific transposition);

tB wṣ “sole wind” [Neferti 29] with the biliteral wṣ;

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2 See JEA, 63 (1977), Plate XXII A.
3 Stela of Merer, see JEA, 47 (1961), pp. 5-9.
mdwt nfrt ti2w stpw “fine words, choice sentences” [Neferti 7-8] with the triliteral stp;

zît ktt “little daughter” [ShS. 129];

3pdw drdrit “foreign flock,” lit. “strange bird” [Neferti 29 and Ostracon P38]
(wrong gender and number of the modifying adjective) with the biliteral dr.

hmwt mrrt (n)swt “the king’s beloved women” lit. “beloved women of the king” [Khetty Stela 1, 4] (honorific transposition and direct genitive).

Nisbes Derived From Nouns

A⁴ + nisbe.

Cardinal point nisbes:

bš rsi “southern boundary” [Semna Stela I, 1] with the nisbe rsi “southern” derived from the noun rsw south (weak consonants suppressed);

mḥti “northern” derived from mḥt “north;”

mḥtiw “northerners” [Urk. IV, 612, 16] (written with the tiw-bird) and a little later in the same text imntiw i3btiw “westerners and easterners” [Urk. IV, 613, 3] (connection), with the plurals of the nisbes imnt, i3bti derived from the nouns imnt “west” and i3bt “east.”

Gentilic nisbes (indicating a person’s origin):

ntrw 3ḥtiw “horizon-dweller gods” lit. “gods of the horizon” [Urk. IV, 142, 13], plural of the nisbe 3ḥti “one of the horizon” (written with false dual) using the ideogram 3ḥt “horizon;”

⁴ The noun modified (by the nisbe), may be absent.
nwti “local” (also written with false dual) from nwt “town,” lit. “he of the town;”

h3stiw “foreigners” (also written with the tiw-bird as) from h3st “foreign land,” lit. “those of the foreign lands;”

biti “king of Lower Egypt” (wearing the red crown) from bit “bee,” lit. “he of the bee.”

nTr(i) “divine” derived from ntr “god.”

Prepositions

When translating texts between French and English, one quickly realizes that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the different sets of propositions of the respective languages. The same situation prevails between Middle Egyptian and English prepositions. Dictionaries give approximate correspondences and the translation is highly dependent on the context.

The most important simple prepositions are the following:

m “in, from, of, as, by, with, through, at;”

r “to, toward, at, against, from, concerning, according to, with respect to, more than (in comparative);”

tp “upon, atop;”

hr “near, by, during, in the presence (of a person of different status);”

ht “through, throughout;”

hr “on, in, at, by, because, for;”

hr “under;”

or or hnt “in front of, at the head of;”

in “by;”

hn “(together) with;”
A more complex example for compound propositions: \[ \text{the one who enters first and leaves last} \] [Hatnub Stela, 5]; quality of an official.

**Prepositional Nisbes**

**Prepositional nisbes** can not only modify nouns and noun phrases (as adjectives) and stand alone (as nouns) but (just like prepositions) they can also govern a following noun or noun phrase:

\[ A^5 \text{ (modified) + prepositional nisbe + B (governed).} \]

Examples for **prepositional nisbes**:

\[ \text{imi “who is in” from the preposition } \text{m, im “in” written with the biliteral } \text{m}. \]

\[ ntrw \text{ imiw } b\text{hnnm “the gods who are in the well” [Kanais A] with the phonogram } \text{hnnm}; \]

\[ \text{imiw-hzt “ancestors” lit. “who are in the front/beginning” [Neferti 54, Intef 8] with the forefront of a lion ideogram } \text{hzt “front”;} \]

\[ (i)m(i)-r “overseer, supervisor” lit. “one who is in the mouth” (sometimes written with the tongue } \text{). Here it should be interpreted as a so-called reverse nisbe “the one in whom the mouth is,” that is, the person who gives commands; \]

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5 May be absent.

6 The second form is used with personal pronouns and as adverbs.
"treasurer," lit "overseer of the houses of silver and gold" [Neferhotep Statue, 2].

Note. The infrequently used preposition \( \text{imitiw} \) "between" is from the prepositional nisbe \( \text{imi} \).

\( \text{iri} \) "who is pertaining to, associated with" (also written with the biliteral \( \text{ir} \)) from the preposition \( r, ir \) "(pertaining) to:"

\( \text{iri} \) \( \text{t} \) "hall-keeper." The official title \( \text{iri} \) \( \text{t} \) \( \text{n pr-HD} \) "keeper of the treasury" (with indirect genitive) is also attested. Similarly, \( \text{iri} \) \( \text{t} \) "door-keeper" with the door ideogram \( \text{iri pDt} \) "bowman" lit. "one pertaining to the bow," written with the biliteral \( pd \).

\( \text{tpi} \) "who is on the top" from the preposition \( t \), \( tp \) "atop" written with the ideogram \( tp \);

\( \text{inpw tp(i) Dw.f} \) "Anubis who is on the top of his mountain;"

\( \text{tpt Dwv} \) "(one) which is on the top of mountains" (referring to a precious stone) [Khetty Stela 2, 10];

\( \text{tp(i)w-t} \) "the living" lit. "those (who are) on earth" [Kanais C, 11].

\( \text{hrt} \) "state, need, condition" [ShS. 20], a (feminine) nisbe lit. "what is near" derived from the preposition \( hr \) "near, by, during." Similarly, \( hrt \) "interest, concern, affair" [Kanais B, 12];

\( \text{hthw} \) "those who are pervading" [Neferti 32], a (plural) nisbe derived from the preposition \( lt \) "throughout;"

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7 The tongue itself is the biliteral \( ns \) but here it should be spelled as \( \text{imi-r}. \)
8 British Museum EA 632.
hr(i) Xnyt “crew-commander, naval commander,” lit. “one above the crew”

[Urk. IV, 1, 16] with hri a nisbe (usually written with the sky determinative as  with hri) derived from the preposition  hr “on.” There is a graphic transposition in the noun Xnyt “crew” written with the biliteral  hn.

r-hr(i) “chief speaker” lit. “the mouth that is above” [Nebwai Stela 1, 3]10 (rare priestly title);

hr(i)w $r “desert nomads/Bedouins” lit. “those upon the sand” [Urk. IV, 617, 13].

hri “what/who is under” (may indicate possession) from the preposition  hr “under;”

hri r hri “undermost to become uppermost”11 [Neferti 55] (description of adverse times) with the preposition r “to, towards;”

hr(i)-ntr “necropolis, cemetery, the place where god is” lit. “(the place) which is under god” [Neferti 55] with honorific transposition, variant writings  and ;

kAwt Hna.f m Xrwt-nTr “the (construction) workers with him as stone cutters” lit. “those under the necropolis” [Kanais B, 10] with the seated man determinative turning the (plural) nisbe into a noun;

dmi hr(i) hwt-nTr “town which has (lit. which is under) a temple” [Kanais B, 9];

hrw.sn “their dependents” with the seated man and woman determinatives lit. “those who are under” [Semna Stela 2, 15];

hr(i)-H(A)b (with variant spellings as ,  and ) “lector-priest” lit. “(one) who has/canies (lit. is under) the festival scroll.” It is written with the feast determinative and ideogram or

11 Lichtheim’s translation.
“from bottom to top” (Egyptian idiom, here referring to cleaning a temple);\(^{12}\)

\(\text{hnt}\) “foremost” lit. “one in front/at the head” [ShS. 65] (with the jar-rack trilateral or \(\text{hnt}\)) is derived from the preposition \(\text{n}\) “in front of, at the head of.”

\(\text{hnt(i) imntiw}\) “foremost of the westerners,” epithet of Osiris.

\(\text{nTr aA, nb anx, xnt(i) Abdw}\) “great god, Lord of Life, Foremost of Abydos” epithets of Osiris [Khu-Sobek Stela 14]\(^{13}\)

The genitival adjective \(\text{n(i)}\) is the prepositional nisbe derived from the preposition \(\text{n}\) “(belonging) to, for.” The most frequent example is \(\text{nswt}\) “king” (also written with the king determinative) which stands for \(\text{n(i)-swt}\) “(one) who has (lit. belongs to) the sedge.”\(^{14}\)

A more complex example:

\(\text{inpw tp(i) Dw.f imi wt nb dsr m swt.f nb nfrt w\text{r\text{e}}t}\)\(^{15}\) “Anubis, who is upon his mountain, and in the place of embalming, lord of the Sacred Land, in all his beautiful and pure places.”

**Adjective as a Noun**

As noted above, adjectives used by themselves are nouns. This is often indicated by a determinative as in \(\text{nfrt}\) “good thing” [Pr. II, 26], \(\text{nfrwt}\) “good things” [ShS. 116] and \(\text{nfrwt}\) “beautiful women” [Khetty Stela 1, 3]. An adjective used as modifying a noun is also a noun that stands in apposition to the noun it modifies as \(\text{inm kn}\) “Amun, the brave (one)” [Kamose Stela 2, 10], and \(\text{ntrw wrw}\) “great gods,” lit. “gods, great ones” [Kanais B, 11] where \(\text{n}\) is for \(\text{wr}\).

More examples:

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\(^{12}\) Stela of Imenyseneb, Louvre 269, lines 7-8.

\(^{13}\) See T. Eric Peet, The Stela of Sebek-khu, Manchester Museum Handbooks 75 (1914).

\(^{14}\) The emblematic plant of Upper Egypt (now extinct).

\(^{15}\) Stela of Merer (National Museum in Cracow); J. Černý, JEA, 47 (1961), pp. 5-9.

\(^{16}\) The cemetery at Abydos.
“fine things” from špss “fine, noble, special” [Khetty Stela 1, 2];
“silent man” [Pr. II, 1] from gr “silent;”
“the white one…the red one” [Neferti 59] (referring to the crowns of Egypt) with hdt usually followed by the determinative and dšrt by the determinative.

“brave things/deeds” [Kamose Stela 2, 4];
“wise man” [Neferti 6] with s3i “wise, prudent;”
“successful man” [Kamose Stela 2, 10] usually written with the tree determinative.
“the beauty of your face” [Neferhotep Statue, 4] with the abstract noun nfrw written in Old Egyptian false plural.

A more complex example:
“Seeing the beauty of Wep-wawet at the First Procession.” (This refers to the first day of the Festival of the Mysteries of Osiris. Amid a mock fight against Osiris’ enemies, the procession is led by the jackal god Wep-wawet whose name lit. is “the opener of the ways.”) (wp “split, open (here a participle);” wšt “road.”)

**Nfr-ḥr Constructions**

17 Statue of the Royal Scribe, Amenhotep, British Museum EA 632.
18 Louvre Stela 275, line 3.
An adjective and noun or noun phrase connection in direct or indirect genitive is called a nfr-ḥr construction. It is common in Middle Egyptian albeit difficult to translate directly: “good (one) of face” an Egyptian idiom for “kindly.”

More examples:

- "valiant of his arm" [Neferti 10];
- “excellent of his fingers” [Neferti 10] (quality of a scribe);
- “clean/pure of fingers” [Nebwau Stela 1, 6]¹⁹ (the first eroded sign is reconstructed);
- “cheerful/bright of face” [Khetty Stela 1, 8];
- “the weak-armed is²⁰ strong-armed” lit. “the weak armed is a possessor of arm” [Neferti 54] with the biliteral sȝ;
- “kind, considerate” lit. “smooth of heart” [Kanais B, 4].
- “firm of sandal” (epithet of an official);²¹
- “weary of my heart” [Intef stela 35]. In general, this phrase means someone with inert heart or slow heart beat, and the god determinative clearly points to the dead Osiris.
- “chief of Retjenu,²² weak/feeble of arms” [Kamose Stela 2, 4] (AB apposition of an indirect genitive and a nfr-ḥr construction).

²⁰ This is actually an adverbial sentence (of identity), the so-called m of predication.
²¹ See for example the stela of Khu-Sobek (Manchester Museum, line 11) in this web site.
²² Present-day Lebanon.
nTr(i) hprw “divine of evolution/form” [Semna Stela II, 1] (Senwosret III’s Horus name) written with the nisbe ḫntri and the triliteral ḫ hôpr.

nTr(i) mswt “divine of birth” [Semna Stela II, 1] Senwosret III’s Two Ladies name.

ḫps “great of strength” [Bull Hunt Scarab 3] (epithet of the pharaoh).

nbdw ḳdw, plural of nbdw-ḳd “evil of character” (the plural strokes are replaced by the foreigner determinatives) generally referring to the enemies of Egypt.

sŷw ibw “broken hearted (ones)” [Semna Stela 2, 13] (plural), where sŷw “broken” itself is a perfective passive participle derived from the verb ḫ sḏ/sḏ “break.”

nfr t ṃ ḫ and in the same text nfr ṃ ḫ23 “beautiful of speech.”

mn ṭbt, ḫr nmṭ “steadfast, (lit. firm of sandal), easy of bearing (lit. steps),” self-laudatory epithets [Khu-Sobek Stela 11].24

**Apparent Adjectives**

There are Egyptian nouns or certain phrases that are not adjectives but equivalent to English adjectives. These are called apparent adjectives. The most frequent is the (MS) noun ky “other.”

Examples:

ky zp nfr “another good deed” [Kanais B, 8];

zp n ky “the deed of another” [Kanais C, 5];

kt st “another place” [Kanais C, 18];

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23 The Stela of Merer, loc. cit., in lines 4 and 14.

24 See Peet, loc. cit.
Another” (F) [Intef Stela 7] with plural strokes because it refers to h₄ t written as “generation,” a feminine collective noun.

A more complex example: hzz w(i) hmₐ r k(i)w(i) “his majesty favored me to others.”

The plural of kₐ is kiwi but when it stands alone it is written as kt-xₜ (a variant of the example) or kt-hₜ.

Other apparent adjectives are the nouns tw “each (one)” and nhi “a little/few.” In addition, the prepositional phrases r dr, r 3w, mi kₐ, mi kᵦ “entire, complete, whole” are also apparent adjectives.

Examples:

“the entire land” [Urk. IV, 2,2];

“all the (lit. whole) wild cattle” [Bull Hunt Scarab 12].

A more complex example:

srw mₙₐ r dr.f mi ₐ r dr.f mi qd.f kₚ [Bull Hunt Scarab 9-10] with srw “the commanders” lit. “the officials of the army” (direct genitive), “nḥw nw mₙₐ “the common soldiers” lit. “the citizens of the army” (indirect genitive), and hₐ ḳₚ “the children of the kap/nursery” (indirect genitive) with the ideogram (and determinative) hₐ ḳₚ. Note that in some 18th Dynasty writings (as here) ḳₚ resembles a wrist and hand. The attached apparent adjectives r dr.f and mi ḳₐ emphasize that the entire army with all its attachments was present at the bull hunt.

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