Nouns and Noun Phrases

Gender

Nouns have two genders: masculine and feminine. Pairs of nouns such as 𓊡𓊙 sn “brother,” 𓊢𓊙 snt “sister” (with the biliteral 𓊢), 𓊡 nb “lord, master, owner,” 𓊢 nbt “lady, mistress” (with the biliteral 𓊡), and 𓊢 nTr “god,” 𓊡 nTrt “goddess” (with the triliteral 𓊢) indicate that nouns must have a root which for these pairs must be shared: sn, nb and nTr. A masculine singular noun usually forms the root itself (with no special ending), and sometimes one of the weak consonants i or w is added (often not written). Feminine nouns almost always end with t. This feminine ending is added, and is not part of the root.

Exceptionally, a noun with t ending is masculine: 𓀼 hₜ “stick, wood, mast (of a ship)” (masculine) (with the biliteral 𓀼), and 𓀞 nswt “king.”

Examples: 𓊡 m₃i “lion” (root m₃ with the biliteral m₃, the eye determinative borrowed from 𓊡 m₃ “see,” and the cowskin determinative 𓀤); 𓊡 miw “cat” (root mi with the biliteral mi); 𓊡 m₃t “northerner” (root m₃t with the double strokes having the phonetic value i), 𓊡 h₃(i) “enemy” (root h₃i), 𓊠 z(i) “man” (root z). The root of m₃i is m₃ since “lioness” is written as 𓊡 m₃t (and not m₃it); similarly, the female cat is written as 𓊡 myt (and not miwt). The feminine counterparts of the last two nouns are: 𓊠 mh₃t “(feminine) northerner,” 𓊡 h₃t “female enemy,” and 𓊠 zt “woman.”

Nouns can be singular, plural and dual. The various endings are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Dual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td>root, root + i, root + w</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td>singular + w</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dual</td>
<td>singular + wi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The masculine plural is almost never indicated by the weak consonant or alone but there are sporadic examples for this: ‘snake’ [ShS. 127], ‘snakes’ [ShS. 61]. More often a masculine plural noun ends with the so-called plural strokes in various arrangements. When the plural strokes are employed, the ending can be indicated (but it is often not written): “birds,” “lions” [ShS. 96-97], sentences (in speech) [Neferti 7] (with the triliteral ‘brave things’ [Kamose Stela 2, 4], “mountains” [Kanais B, 7] (with the bilateral and ideogram and the stone determinative). To form the feminine plural is almost never indicated, just the plural strokes, for example: “thing, property,” “things” [Neferti 10] and “word,” “words” [Neferti 7] (with the bilateral ). If the rare feminine noun “interruption” (derived from the verb “cease”) is the correct spelling in singular then [Khetty Stela 2, 8] is a rare writing of the feminine plural. In Old Egyptian the plural was often written with threefold repetition of the determinative, for example “fingers” (with the ideogram ). In Middle Egyptian this practice died out with sporadic exceptions such as “gods” for “blessings” [Urk. IV, 1] Different from the pool determinative .
(with the biliteral $\text{hz}$), $\text{hkrw}$ “royal insignia” (with the ideogram $\text{hkr}$ “adorn”), $\text{htwt}$ “quarries, mines,” plural of $\text{htt}$ [Khetty Stela 2, 4] (with the enclosure plan ideogram $\text{hwt}$), and $\text{t$bw}$ “lands” [Kanais C, 10]. Sometimes the plural is written irregularly, for example, in [Urk. IV, 612, 17] the plural of $\text{rkw}$ “opponent” is written as $\text{rkyw}$ (instead of $\text{rkww}$).

The plural for nouns that end with –$ti$ is usually written with the $tiw$-bird, the Egyptian vulture. For example, the plural of $\text{bit(i)}$ “king of Lower Egypt” (with the bee/honey ideogram $\text{bit}$) is written as $\text{bitiw}$ “kings of Lower Egypt” [Kanais C, 1].

For certain nouns plural strokes are employed even though the nouns themselves are not plural. These false plurals occur for collective nouns such as $\text{nbw}$ “gold,” $\text{t$}$ “bread” (with the loaf of bread and bread roll determinatives³), $\text{mf$k$t}$ “turquoise” (with the biliteral $\text{k$j}$), $\text{hmt}$ “copper, bronze” (with the ideogram $\text{hmt}$), $\text{ms$}$ “expeditionary force, army,” $\text{iti}$ “barley,” and for some mostly abstract nouns that end with $\text{w}$: $\text{h$}$ “wealth, excess, surplus” (with the biliteral $\text{h$j}$), $\text{b$}$ “impressiveness, might,” (also written as $\text{hw}$ “unique, exceptional” [Khetty Stela 2, 9] also in the phrase $\text{hr$}$ “except me” [Kanais C, 7] (with the biliteral $\text{hr}$); $\text{hrd$}$ “childhood,” $\text{nfr$}$ “beauty” (with the triliteral $\text{nfr}$), $\text{t$bw}$ “wind” [Neferti 29].

In the following list of war-booty from Kamose’s northern campaign [Kamose Stela 2, 13-14] most of the nouns are collective:

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² Different from the $\beta$-bird, the buzzard.

³ The latter is sometimes written as $\text{ms}$.
nbw $\text{hsbd}$ $\text{hd}$ $\text{mfkt}$ $\text{hzmn}$ $\text{minb}$...$b3k$ $\text{sntr}$ $\text{c}$ $\text{bit}$ “gold, lapis lazuli, silver, turquoise, bronze axes...$b3k$-oil, incense, fat, honey.” Here $\text{hzmn}$ is the ideogram for “natron, amethyst, bronze,” the biliteral $\text{mr}$ has two phonetic values $\text{mi}$, $\text{c}$ $\text{d}$ is the biliteral, and $\text{o}$, $\text{a}$, $\text{d}$ are all determinatives. Note the transposition in $\text{sntr}$.

The irregularly written $\text{nswt}$ “king” has also irregular plural: $\text{nsywt}$ $\text{sriw}$ $\text{rhyt}$ “kings, officials and common people/subjects” [Kanais B, 12]. Here the previously noted determinative $\text{sri}$ is the ideogram $\text{sri}$ “official.” The last noun written with the $\text{rhyt}$- (or $\text{rhwit}$-) bird $\text{t}$ $\text{t}$ or $\text{t}$ is collective.

The feminine plural of the official title title $\text{pt-pDt}$ “troop commander, captain, leader” is written as $\text{pwt-pDt}$ [Kanais C, 1] with the bow biliteral $\text{pd}$.

The writing of the plural of the noun $\text{mn}$ “monument” with plural phonetic complements has already been mentioned. A few other spellings of the plural are $\text{mnw}$, where the last spelling is from [Kanais C, 5].

**Dual**

The older form of the **dual** was doubling the singular or just the determinative, and in later writing the weak consonant $i$ in both masculine and feminine is usually written as the **dual** stroke $\text{\textbackslash\textbackslash}$. For example, $\text{a}$ “arm,” $\text{wi}$ [Neferti 4] or $\text{a}$, $\text{a}$ “two arms” [Urk. IV, 612, 3]; $\text{gs}$ “side, half,” $\text{gswi}$ “two sides” [Neferti 29]; $\text{rd}$ “foot,”

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4 $\text{hzmn}$ is “natron, amethyst” and, changing the determinative, $\text{it}$ is “bronze. Since the word “axe” has the same determinative, it is shown only once.
“two feet” [Neferti 27]; “land,” “Two Lands” (Egypt); “eye” (with the biliteral ir), “eyes” [Neferti 34, 53], “soles” from sandal [Urk. IV, 612, 17].

The feminine dual of “lady, mistress” is “two ladies.” Written as this noun has a special meaning: the two ladies refer to the protector goddesses Nekhbet nhbt (vulture in Upper Egypt) and Wadjet w³dt (cobra in Lower Egypt). They are also identified with the white and red crown of Upper and Lower Egypt [Kanais B, 14]. Note also that nbti is also one of the five names in the full royal titulary of a king.

“phtt” for phti in NB-PHITI-R the throne name of Ahmose I [Urk. IV, 2, 13] is the so-called sportive dual. This construction occurs sporadically: for biti in the throne name of Sneferu [Kagemni II, 8] and for hwi “strike, smite, hit” [ShS. 36-37].

The singular noun gnwti “sculptor” is sometimes written as a false dual: . Other examples are the nisbe5 nwti “local” from nwt “town,” dšrti Red Land (vague location in the desert) [Kanais C, 10], and it for itii for “sovereign.”

King Khasekhemui’s Serekh Name

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5 See Adjectives.

6 The phonetic value of the sign 3d may have changed through the sequence 3d →it →it.
“Khasekhemui² ³ ḫtp-ntrwi-im.f “the two gods²³ are content with him.” Two examples can be seen here for masculine dual: The adjective Ṝḥm “powerful” (written here with a single triliteral instead of Ṝḥmwi) is used as a noun “powerful one” and its masculine dual Ṝḥmwi “two powerful ones” refer to Horus and Seth. As we have seen earlier, the falcon on standard Ṣ is a determinative for divinity, but it is also the ideogram nṯr “god.” The symmetric composition of the two falcons on standards facing each other is the dual of the masculine noun nṯr “god,” usually transliterated as nṯrwi “two gods” (once again referring to Horus and Seth.) Finally, note the honorific transposition⁹ of nṯrwi and ḫtp.

Another example for masculine and feminine duals is Ṣḥmti … nbwi “Two Powerful Ones…Two Lords” [Neferti 60]. In a symmetric composition, the first refers to the Two Ladies and the second to the Two Lords.

**Queen Hatshepsut’s Cartouche**

Inn-hmn-ḥḥ-T-ŠPSWT “Amun is united with Hatshepsut¹⁰ (lit. “foremost of noblewomen”¹¹). Here Ṣ (a variant of Ṣ) is the ideogram šps/šps “noble.” With the seated man determinative it becomes the noun Ṣ šps “nobleman.” Its feminine counterpart is Ṣ špst “noblewoman” (showing the root šps), and finally the plural strokes give the plural “noblewomen.”

**Appositions and Connections**

Nouns that refer to the same thing can be juxtaposed without any connecting word to form an apposition: Ṣ m-nr³ (n)swt nṯrw Amun-Re, king of the gods [Kanais A].

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² ²nd Dynasty pharaoh. The picture is from http://xoomer.virgilio.it/francescoraf/hesyra/Khasekhemwy.htm
³ Horus and Seth.
⁹ See below.
¹⁰ ¹⁸th Dynasty pharaoh.
¹¹ A direct genitive construction discussed below.
Nouns that refer to different things can also be juxtaposed to form a connection. More frequently, a connecting word such as 𓊂𓊏 nfr “with” or 𓊊𓊏 “on” is used. Examples for juxtaposed connection:

\[\text{ni̇trw nṯrw “gods and goddesses” [Kanais C, 18] with the cobra determinative for “goddess;”} \]

\[\text{hmwt t3ww “women and men” [Kamose Stela 2, 32], where t3y means “man;”} \]

\[\text{hmw hmwt(t) “male and female servants” [Urk. IV, 2, 3] with the biliteral hm;} \]

\[\text{rmw 3pdw [Neferti 30]}. \]

Examples for connection with connecting word:

\[\text{sfdw nfr gsti “papyrus scroll and scribe’s palette” [Neferti 16]} \]

with the biliteral ti;

\[\text{rmw … nfr 3pdw “fish… and birds” [ShS. 51]}; \]

\[\text{nhh nhrt dt “eternity (eternal cyclical repetition in time) and eternity (fixed and unchanging)” [Neferti 62] with the platform determinative nh, the nḥ-bird (guinea-fowl), and graphic transposition in nhh;} \]

\[\text{hd nfr nbw “silver and gold” [Irtysen Stela 14]}; \]

\[\text{imm-nfr nfr psdt.f “Amun-Re and his$^{12}$ Ennead” (group of nine gods) [Kanais A, 1] with the triliteral psd}; \]

\[\text{3bw w nbw “ivory and (lit. to) ebony” [Irtysen Stela 15]}. \]

**Possession: Direct Genitive**

To indicate that one thing belongs to another, Middle Egyptian can juxtapose two nouns or noun phrases A and B to form a direct genitive: AB meaning “A of B.”

$^{12}$ See Pronouns.
Examples:

- $\text{st mw}$ “waterway” (lit. “place of water”) [Neferti 28] with the biliteral $\text{st}$;
- $\text{tr 3ht}$ “season of Inundation” [Kamose Stela 2, 31-32] with an alternative writing of $\text{tr}$ “season, time” (the combined sign $\text{t}$ is a determinative typical for words ending with $\text{tr}$ or $\text{ri}$);
- $\text{rdiw ht}$ “giver of gift(s),” lit. “thing(s)” [Khetty Stela 1, 9], where the extended arm with bread is the biliteral $\text{di}$;
- $\text{itiw ntrw}$ “forefathers of the gods” [Kanais B, 9] with the plural of “father” meaning “forefathers,” and the horned viper (which is usually the uniliteral $\text{f}$) being the determinative in $\text{iti}$ “father;”
- $\text{ti-mri}$ “Egypt,” lit. “land of the hoe” [Kanais C, 1] with the biliteral $\text{mr}$, where the twin town determinative emphasizes the united Upper and Lower Egypt;
- $\text{hk3w rhyt}$ “rulers of subjects” [Kanais C, 1] with the ruler’s staff triliteral $\text{hk}$;
- $\text{hw h3swt}$ “best of foreign countries” (reference to precious stones and minerals) [Khetty Stela 2, 9], where $\text{hw}$ “unique, exceptional” was noted above;
- $\text{phww t3w}$ “earth’s limits/ends of the earth” [Urk. IV, 617, 6] with the biliteral (hind legs of a lion) $\text{ph}$ and the tongue of land $\text{t}$ substituting for $\text{t3}$ “land.”
- $\text{pr zp 2}$ “Holy of the Holies,” lit. “enclosure of the enclosure(s),” refers to the innermost chamber of an Egyptian temple, the so-called “sanctuary” (here in the temple of Karnak), and $\text{zp 2}$ is the Egyptian ditto sign. The composition is to be read $\text{pr pr(w)}$ [Kamose Stela 2, 33].
The previously discussed phrase \( nbw \ h^5w \ ntrw \) “gold, the body/flesh of gods” is an apposition AB with B being the direct genitive \( h^5w \ ntrw \).

**Possession: Indirect Genitive**

Middle Egyptian can also place the *genitival adjective* \( n/nt/nw \) between two nouns and noun phrases to form an *indirect genitive*. The genitival adjective roughly follows the number and gender of A:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Gender of A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>masculine singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( nt )</td>
<td>feminine (singular, plural, dual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( nw )</td>
<td>masculine plural or dual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples with *masculine singular A*:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{wAw} \ n \ w\ddash w-r & \quad \text{“wave of the sea” [ShS. 40-41] with the forktailed sparrow} \\
\text{ib} \ n \ zi & \quad \text{“man’s heart/mind” [Neferti 42]} \\
\text{t\ddash w} \ n \ \text{\( \hbar \)} & \quad \text{“breath of life” [Urk. IV, 613, 13] with the ideogram} \quad \text{t\ddash w “air, wind, breath”} \\
\text{hw} \ n \ \text{iw} \ pn & \quad \text{“interior of this island” [ShS. 119] with the ideogram} \quad \text{iw “island;”} \\
\text{s\ddash st\ddash t\ddash n} \ \text{mdw-ntr} & \quad \text{“secret of the hieroglyphs,” lit. “secret of god’s words/speech” [Irtysen Stela 7] with the biliteral} \quad \text{t\ddash t and honorific transposition in mdw-ntr}^{13} \\
\text{hm} \ n \ nb.i & \quad \text{“majesty of my\textsuperscript{14} lord” [Khetty Stela 2, 9] with the ideogram} \quad \text{hm “majesty” or “incarnation;”}
\end{align*}\]

\(^{13}\) See below.  
\(^{14}\) See Pronouns.
iti mwt n hr-nb “father and mother of everyone” [Kanais A] (referring to king Sety I) with the Egyptian idiom hr-nb “everyone.”

A more complex example is the following (description of the sage Neferti by the officials of the court to the pharaoh): hr-ḥ3b, ṣ3 n b3st “lector-priest, great one of Bubastis” [Neferti 9]. This is an apposition of two noun phrases. The first phrase is a nisbe construction. The second phrase is an indirect genitive A n B in which A is an adjective ṣ3 “great” used as a noun “great one,” and B is b3st Bubastis, a town in the eastern Delta. As the cobra determinative suggests (it is usually placed after the name of a goddess) the spelling of b3st is influenced by the cat-goddess b3stt “Bastet” whose cult center was Bubastis.

Examples with feminine A:

knbt nt ḫnw “council/magistrates of the capital” [Neferti 4] with the “corner” ideogram knbt “council;”

ḥ3t nt ṭ3-mḥw “Delta marshes” [Neferti 29];

st.f nt sndm “his place of residence” [ShS. 77-78] with the pod triliteral ndm “pleasant” in causative sndm “residence,” lit. “cause to be/feel pleasant;”

iṣṭ nt ḏt “belongings of the estate” [Khetty Stela 1, 8-9] with the collective noun iṣṭ translated as plural;

sḫnt 4 nt pt “four pillars of heaven” [Urk IV, 612, 9].

A more complex example is the following: t3 mšḥnt nt nṯr nb “birthplace of all the gods” [Neferti 57]. This has an AB nt C construction in which AB is the direct genitive t3 mšḥnt, lit. “land of birth.” t3 is the biliteral ms. The spelling of mšḥnt (the cobra determinative) is influenced by the goddess of birth whose name has the same

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15 See later in Adjectives.
16 Lichtheim translates Bubastis as Bastet of the East.
17 The writing has been discussed in Egyptian Writing.
18 See Pronoun.
spelling. Part C is a noun + adjective construction with \( nb \) “every, all” being the primary adjective.\(^{19}\) Examples with **plural first part A:**

\[ h^r w n w h^t \] “weapons of fight/war” [Neferti 39] with the biliteral \( h^t \);

\[ w^r n w s h \] “postures/positions of birds” (the artisan/sculptor Irtysen relates his skills) [Irtysen Stela 10] with the triliteral \( s h \);

\[ prw n w m t t \] “houses of the Northener” [Khetty Stela 2, 3], where the Northener is probably an administrator of turquoise mines in the Sinai peninsula.

The singular noun \( irw \), being liquid, is treated as plural. This noun phrase appears in a sentence:

“foreign flocks are to drink from the rivers of Egypt” with \( swri \) “drink;” that is why the unusual speaking man determinative in \( irw \).

\[ nrw n w h m k \] “fear of your majesty” [Urk. IV, 613, 14] with \( km \), having phonetic value \( nr \), and where the plural genitival adjective is fooled by the false plural of \( nrw \) “fear.”

A more complex example:

\[ s s m n h w t - n b w m s s t t n nb i b g w \] “the ritual of the Mansion of Gold in the mysteries of the lord of Abydos” [Nebwaui Stela 1, 5].\(^{20}\) The Mansion of Gold is a temple in Abydos, and the lord of Abydos refers to Osiris.

**Honorific Transpositions**

In a direct genitive AB the order is usually reversed, BA, if the possessor B is a god or a king. Examples:

\[ h w t - n t r \] “temple” lit. “god’s enclosure” [Kanais A, 1], also written as \( n s t \).\(^{21}\)

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19 See Adjectives.
pr-(n)sw(t) “royal residence, palace” [Khetty Stela 1, 10];

mdw-ntr “god’s words/speech” [Irtysen Stela 7];

or it(i)-ntr “god’s father” [Shemai Stela I.163/1] (priestly title);

whm(w)-(n)swt “royal herald” [Urk. IV, 3, 14] with the triliteral wHm “repeat;”

snTr “incense” [Kamose Stela 2, 14] with a somewhat strange honorific/graphic transposition of nTr and sn;

b-ntr “god’s land” [Urk. IV, 615, 12] is a vaguely defined geographic location south/east of Egypt. It usually includes the exotic land of Punt (with main import of incense). More generally, b-ntr can designate far-off lands as in

sz hr qww nw b-ntr m hµw b3 nbt kpni “cedar on the mountains of the god’s land in

the vicinity of the ‘lady of Byblos.’” The biliteral kp (or the triliteral kµp) is used in kpni, a later spelling of kbn, “Byblos” a coastal town in Lebanon. The name of the town itself is “the lady of Byblos” referring to the goddess Hathor.

In the following text there are three honorific transpositions: rh-(n)swt mry m³ nb.f mh ib (n)swt m Špssw.f “the king’s acquaintance, beloved of his lord, who fills the king’s heart with fine things” [Khetty Stela 1, 2].

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21 For example, JEA, 91 (2005) p. 91.