CHAPTER IV

THE MONOPARTITE PROVERBS

1. Monopartite Proverbs in Demotic and Greek: Introductory Remarks

Demotic and Greek monopartite proverbs, strictly speaking, consist of one independent clause. In the demotic examples, this type of structure is commonly expanded by a phrase in anticipation, frequently placed at the beginning of a proverb (for instance, the bold part of Dr3: shm.t\(dn.t\) mn-mtw=s hy ‘An evil woman, she does not have a husband’).\(^1\) However, because the anticipatory unit can only be an unexpanded phrase rather than a full clause, the proverb containing it remains monopartite.

Similar to the common type of demotic monopartite proverbs with an anticipatory unit are the Greek monopartite proverbs with a circumstantial or a conditional participle (for example, Gg9: οὐδεὶς πονηρόν πράγμα χρηστός ὃν ποιεῖ ‘No one does an evil thing, if he is good’).\(^2\) Although such participles, when translated, can be developed into subordinate clauses, in their current unexpanded form, as is the case with the demotic anticipatory units discussed above, they do not affect the monopartite structure of the proverbs of which they form a part.

2. Demotic Monopartite Proverbs

As noted above in III.5, most of the demotic proverbs employ constructions associated with what has been called “the omni-present” tense. In monopartite proverbs, these constructions are: the habitual, the second present, some indicative sdm=fs, the adjective-verb, the sentence with an adverbial predicate, the nominal sentence, the cleft sentence, and the imperative or the vetitive.

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\(^1\) Ankh. 25/22.
\(^2\) Men. Mon. 615.
The habitual verb form \([\text{dmA}]^3\) is, in general, the most common type of construction in demotic proverbs of the statement type.\(^4\) It is always used in the indicative, either in the affirmative \(\langle hr \ sdm=f \rangle\) or the negative \(\langle bw-\text{tr}=f \ sdm \rangle,^5\) with or without an adverbia, with or without an anticipatory unit, and always conveying a general truth. Examples of this type of structure are proverbs \(\text{D}14\): \(\langle hr \ tw \ dlh \ s\ k \ rmt \ s \ \text{‘Disdain ruins the great man’} \rangle, \text{D}15\): \(\langle bw-\text{tr} \ r\ \ rmt \ n\ zy=f \ ssw \ zyt \ \text{‘A man does not know his days (of) misfortune’} \rangle,^6\) or \(\text{D}16\): \(\langle hwr\tf \ tw \ mn \ sgkh \ bw-\text{tr} \ p\\zeta=f \ s \ nb \ tyf \ \text{‘A feast in which there is no calm, its master cannot enjoy (it)’} \rangle.\(^7\)

As one can observe in these examples, the subject is always in the third person, and most frequently in the singular. This is a general characteristic of (mono-, bi-, or multipartite) proverbs of the statement type and is due to the fact that, in such statements, the nominals used as subjects or objects/predicates are ethical terms used generically to describe a common human character or a category of things, rather than a specific person or thing. In the aforementioned examples, \(dlh, \ rmt \ s, \ rmt, \ ssw \ zyt,\) and \(hwr\tf\) are terms used in such a way (for a further discussion of the vocabulary used in the Egyptian and Greek bodies of text, see VI.6).

Moreover, in two examples from The Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy, the affirmative and negative habitual forms are used in proverbs introduced by \(hmy \ iw \ \text{‘would that’};\) these are: \(\text{D}17\): \(hmy \ iw \ hr \ bpr \ sp \ ps \ mwt \ \text{‘Would that existence (lit. becoming or happening) succeed death!’}\) and \(\text{D}18\): \(hmy \ iw \ bw-\text{tr} \ ts \ sh(t) \ ir-w\!\!\\wz \ w\!\!\\w\!\!\\z \ \text{‘Would that the field not fail to flourish!’}^8\)

Here it may be observed that the addition of \(hmy \ iw\) at the beginning of each proverb affects the positioning of the constituents of the verbal

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\(^3\) These initials are used henceforth to indicate the various structural models. In these indications, \(dm\) stands for “demotic monopartite”, \(db\) for “demotic bipartite”, \(dmu\) for “demotic multipartite”, \(gm\) for “Greek monopartite”, \(gb\) for “Greek bipartite”, and \(gmu\) for “Greek multipartite”, while the capital letters indicate the various types of sentence structure, a list of which is found in appendix B.

\(^4\) In The Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy, for instance, there are 53 examples of habitual constructions out of a total of 178 monopartite proverbs.

\(^5\) The only exception concerning the negative form is the negative habitual of the verb \(\text{tr} \ ‘\text{to know’, which becomes } bw-\text{tr} \ r\=f\) (Grammar of Demotic, §123).

\(^6\) Ankh. 12/10 and 12/3.

\(^7\) Ins. 23/9.

\(^8\) 10/25 and 10/18. Note that Lardinois excluded such wishes from his analysis, disagreeing with taking them as pieces of proverbial material (1995, p. 33—fn. 7). However, I choose to examine such sentences here given their position in the collections and their short, single-proverb-like form.